Leftovers from the British Empire:
Stories from post-colonial India

A Memoir
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Preface

> "I recount these life stories to extol the virtues of pathways marked by unpredictable life-changing events small and large. Contingency is to be embraced not feared." *Paul C. Sereno*[1]

On June eleventh, as I settled into a wooden pew, well-polished by the passage of eighty-two years' worth of behinds that had sat there before me, surrounded by the families and friends of graduating students, in the University of Chicago's Rockefeller Memorial Chapel, at the Class of 2010's Baccalaureate ceremony, I looked around me, entranced by the beauty of the towering chapel's gothic architecture, the stained-glass windows, the intricate hanging lanterns, listening to the speeches, fanning my perspiring face with my program. There I sat, proud mother, exhausted middle-aged lone parent, reflecting upon my daughter's achievements, as my mind flipped through the picture postcards of random memories from the preceding four years, unaware that I was soon to be presented with a very personal epiphany, the signposts to my next fork-in-the-road.

On June twelfth, during the University's five hundred and third Convocation Address by Paleontologist Paul C. Sereno, "*Historical Contingency and Ultimate Aims,*" one particular sentence burrowed its way into my consciousness:

> "The real sadness in life, it's worth remembering, is that some of our finest talents and capabilities will go undiscovered." [2]

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[1] Paul C. Sereno, PhD, Professor in Organismal Biology & Anatomy, "*Historical Contingency and Ultimate Aims", (*Class of 2010 Spring Convocation, June 12, 2010, University of Chicago) http://www.uchicago.edu/about/documents/convocation/20100614_sereno.shtml

I had begun to consider the possibility, before that weekend in June, that I had expended my quota of forks in the road; that I would have to resign myself to spending the remainder of what had become a very ordinary working life, rolling, like Sisyphus, my rock up the hill, day after seemingly inconsequential day, wondering occasionally why and how I had allowed my talents and capabilities to go so largely unused. My trouble, I used to tell myself, and others who happened to inquire, while expressing great surprise upon noticing a particular talent with tedious regularity, was this: my leanings were so varied and numerous, and equal in intensity, that I had never been able to relinquish the many in favor of the one. Good, but not enough. I had raised a daughter with apparent success. Is that enough?

Reading further through the text of Dr. Sereno's speech, having looked it up online when I returned to Raleigh, I uncovered further pivotal observations.

> "We have discovered some ground rules, such as the timely, almost clocklike extinction that awaits all species. Chance events, like an earth-shattering asteroid, also play a major role. Looking back across deep time, we are amazed at evolution's handiwork in fashioning fins into limbs and wings in species long extinct, but we also stand in awe at the unpredictable power of happenstance. The predictable and unpredictable—evolution's yin and yang—apply in particular to our species. We yearn to see ourselves as the fine-tuned pinnacle of evolution, something more than an odd and plucky survivor, whose lineage more than once teetered on the brink of extinction. In paleontology we call such circuitous pathways historical contingency." [3]

Historical Contingency, I reflected, was a very good turn of phrase, one I could use to describe the events leading up to the forks in my road – my Circuitous Pathways. Happenstance, I could relate to. My personal chance events were certainly not along the magnitude of earth-shattering asteroids, but they were very real, nevertheless. One phrase I had once thought of as

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[2] Ibid.
[3] Paul C. Sereno, PhD, Professor in Organismal Biology & Anatomy, "*Historical Contingency and Ultimate Aims", (*Class of 2010 Spring Convocation, June 12, 2010, University of Chicago) http://www.uchicago.edu/about/documents/convocation/20100614_sereno.shtml

describing rather aptly the often peculiar passage and confluence of events in my life: "*Serendipitous Synchronicity*."

I believe I'm not alone in this.

Prologue

I grew up in India, a child of the early 1950's, an India fresh out of its colonial past, when the remnants of the British Empire still lingered on. My mother's family traced their antecedents through several generations of British civil servants who lived, worked and settled in India. My father's parents were immigrants from Russia who settled in Brooklyn, New York.

This is a collection of stories about myself, of the places I've been, and the people who populated my life both during my time as well as those who existed before I came into the world, as I ricocheted through life, taking what later always seemed to be the wrong fork in the road.

When I was six, I stood at the edge of a paddy field in the valley of a coffee plantation in southern India, bare toes pressed into the damp earth, and as I looked out into the surrounding jungle, air thrumming with cicada song, watching expectantly, listening to the bungalow watchman mimic the sawing mating call of a leopard as he rubbed a stick through a tight hole in goat hide drawn taut over the mouth of a large round red clay pot. I declared to myself then that I wanted to be a planter's wife when I grew up. I would remember this place, this thought, but not until almost half a lifetime had passed.

When I was eight, I dreamed of being a ballet dancer. The school had, briefly, that year, a teacher who taught ballet. She produced a splendid version of Swan Lake, with me as the dying swan, my final graceful, tragic act bringing the audience to its feet, thunderous applause

bouncing off the rafters of that great hall. But I knew very well even then, that a hill-station in southern India was not the right place to be, for a ballet dancer.

When I was ten, I wanted to be an archeologist. I read extensively, of all things archeological, astronomical, geological and geographical. I was caught reading my favorite book about The Earth (a well illustrated and engrossing mix of the aforementioned subjects) during after-dinner study hour in boarding school, by Sister Wolfhilde, who confiscated that precious book, despite my protestations that I had finished my homework. I can still remember my dismay at the perceived injustice of that act. This was no trivial book; it was clearly educational, though, granted, not a proscribed textbook. Why take it away from me? And then never return it? The loss is still palpable, the sense of injustice, acute.

By the time I was twelve, I had realized I could write. I wrote a short story for English class and was asked to read it out aloud in class. My classmates listened in rapt attention, the teacher beamed, and I was encouraged to write more short stories. I read them all out aloud. I wrote long letters to distant pen-pals in various parts of the world, once describing the ubiquitous, tall eucalyptus trees, stripped of all their lower leaves that had been harvested for their oil, as paint brushes painting clouds up in the sky. My correspondents wrote back in admiration, insisting I should write a book, or better still, books, when I grew up. I declared I would. I could also draw and paint.

Finishing high school at sixteen, having majored in physics and chemistry (yes, this was the British Senior Cambridge High School system, and we had majors), I set out on a daily trek by bus from my grandparent's house in the outlying village of Whitefield into the city of Bangalore, where I attempted to apply myself to the study of psychology at a freshly minted College for Women (Art, what I had wanted, was, sadly, not among the offerings then, and I now

have no recollection of why I settled upon psychology in its stead. I do know that the study of the human mind, albeit on a casual basis, still holds a fascination for me even today). One month into those bus journeys, an hour long each way, jostling for space with village women carrying wide cane baskets laden with a variety of farm produce from protesting chickens to freshly picked, morning-dew-damp-green, fragrant bunches of fenugreek and coriander, fending off the supplicating, insistent arms of beggars reaching through the windows at every stop (the lepers were my waking nightmares), I decided I could take no more. A psychologist, or anything for that matter, that required that daily bus journey, I would never become. My mother, in frustration, or perhaps resignation, suggested I go to secretarial school, which took just one year to complete, and bought me a moped. "You will always be able to find a job as a secretary," she declared. I still, occasionally, dream dreams of long drives, invariably in the dark, sometimes in a rickety bus, sometimes on a moped, on that bumpy road between Bangalore and Whitefield, in which my destination seems always just out of reach, always just over the next hillock. That I never had a mechanical breakdown or an accident was nothing short of miraculous.

Were I to continue describing every successive fork in the road between then and now in full detail, I would be well on my way to writing an entire book. To condense matters, skip over a continent or two and collapse time, it's sufficient to relate that I eventually achieved what my father so avidly wished – a college degree – as I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in "English – Communications Studies" from the University of California in Bakersfield in 1981 – at the height of the early '80's US recession. To compound my slim chances of success, I moved to California's central coast (an area neither then nor now a crucible of career advancement, except, perhaps, for fishermen) where I accomplished little, while I frittered away the next three years, the first jobless, living with friends on a hillside overlooking (at a considerable distance) the

Pacific Ocean, befriending a desolate donkey I named Pegasus, and raising a prematurely dropped Black Angus calf my friends named Yoda (because of her ears; I'd wanted to name her Pavlova), which brings me to 1984.

1984 – *Annus Mirabilis*

1984 fell in the middle of the last – as in most recent – three-year transit of Saturn in the Eighth House of Scorpio. This is a cosmic event of considerable magnitude. Astrologically speaking, Saturn's transit in Scorpio is known as a *malefic placement*. It is said such a transit can determine the future course of many lives. Though seen as a fruitful Sign among the active and eminent amongst us, Scorpio is also known as an accursed constellation: it was, after all, the birthplace of Martis Sidus, or the House of the planet Mars. Mars, we should know, was named after the Roman god of war. The co-rulers of Scorpio – Mars and Pluto – highlight crime, public mortality and power struggles. Reading a little deeper into matters astrological, I learn a *malefic* planet is traditionally thought to bring bad luck and misfortune. Mars is considered the *lesser malefic*, while Saturn is the *greater malefic*. Adding a lesser evil to a greater evil can only produce a Great Big Evil. To borrow and adapt from Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz: Mars and Pluto and Saturn Oh My.

It is intriguing to take note of this cosmic confluence of multiple malevolent planetary placements now, in retrospect, many years later, but I would not have given it much thought had I stumbled upon these foreboding astrological observations as the year began.

Taking myself back in time to 1984 – the year starts out uneventfully enough – I am in California, on the central coast, and am in the process of making plans for a long-overdue and much looked-forward-to journey to India, to visit my family.

A selection of random events, as the year begins:

January 27 – Michael Jackson's hair catches on fire. During the shooting of a Pepsi commercial, sparks from a special-effects mishap ignite his hair.

March 16 – The CIA station chief in Beirut, William Francis Buckley, is kidnapped by Islamic Jihad and later dies in captivity.

April 1 – Marvin Gaye, the Motown legend, is shot and killed by his father in a domestic dispute. He started his career as a member of the doo-wop group The Moonglows in the late 1950s. My mother liked their music.

May 5 – The Herreys win the Eurovision Song Contest 1984 for Sweden, with the song *Diggi-Loo, Diggi-Ley*. I fell in love with an impossibly handsome young Swede in Juhu, Bombay in 1972. It was a long affair that spanned many years and three continents, until he met and married a girl on a whim while on holiday in Mexico. Anything to do with Sweden reminds me of Anders.

May 7 – The Soviets boycott the Los Angeles Summer Olympics. Citing "undisguised threats" against their athletes, the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, and East Germany do not attend the Summer Games. Nobody I know really gives this much thought.

May 11 – A transit of Earth from Mars takes place. This is another cosmic event, though of Astronomical significance, not Astrological. A transit of Earth across the Sun as seen from Mars takes place when the planet Earth passes directly between the Sun and Mars, obscuring a small part of the Sun's disc for an observer on Mars. During a transit, Earth can be seen from

Mars as a small black disc moving across the face of the Sun. Transits of Earth from Mars usually occur in pairs, with one following the other after 79 years; rarely, there are three in the series. The transits also follow a 284-year cycle, occurring at intervals of 100.5, 79, 25.5, and 79 years; a transit falling on a particular date is usually followed by another transit 284 years later. Transits occurring when Mars is at its ascending node are in May. No one has ever seen a transit of Earth from Mars, but the next one will take place on November 10, 2084.[4] My birthday is on November 10, but I will be long gone by the year 2084, so this is just a curious coincidence.

May 13 – I leave Arroyo Grande, California, where I have been living on a hillside for the past three years with three friends: John – once-intended spouse but whom I have been holding at arms' length for a period, convinced he is a big mistake – and Mona and her husband Fiddler. John drives me down to Los Angeles International Airport. I am bound for India, where I will spend three months on holiday visiting my parents, apportioning my allotted time between them. They do not live together; they have been separated since I was two and a half. Daddy married Yvonne, after the two took a trip to Mexico to get Daddy's divorce. I was fifteen then, or perhaps fourteen.

Yvonne had run away from her husband with her small daughter Vanessa, who was eleven months older than I, moved into the house across the street from my parents when I was very little, and proceeded to make eyes at my Daddy. Yvonne had big breasts; Daddy liked big breasts. The street between the houses was not really a street; it was just a sandy track, three houses up from the beach in Juhu, Bombay. When I was two and a half, Mummy had had enough, of Yvonne, and of Daddy's drinking, and had packed me and a few things in the big Ford and driven away to her parents in Whitefield which is ten miles from Bangalore, which was

[4] Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transit_of_Earth_from_Mars#cite_ref-Earth1984_0-1

a very long drive from Juhu, Bombay. Yvonne and Vanessa moved right in with Daddy. Our cook Florie was in collusion with Yvonne. Mummy said Florie used to hide Yvonne's toothbrush when she knew Mummy was coming to visit so that she wouldn't know Yvonne was really staying at our house.

Mummy lost no time in finding a job and moved up to the Nilgiri Hills in South India where she worked as Headmistress of a small boarding school, later opening her own small boarding school. Daddy lost no time in suing her for custody of me; they spent fourteen years fighting over me in the Indian courts. I spent Christmases under court order with Daddy and Yvonne and Vanessa until I was about seven. Sometime between when I was three and seven – perhaps when I was six, I began to refer to Yvonne as Daddy's Concubine, since she lived with him but they were not married – not for many years. There are many men in the Bible who have concubines, I had noticed. One day when Grandpa, my Mummy's father, was reading to us from the Bible after breakfast around the big oval teak table in the dining room with the Afghan sniper looking down upon us from the picture on the wall, he read a passage from the Book of Kings, about King Solomon who had seven hundred wives and seven hundred concubines. I asked Grandpa what a concubine was and he told me, and I said, "So Yvonne must be Daddy's Concubine." Grandpa, Granny and Mummy found this funny I think, because they all laughed, and Grandpa said yes, you could say that's what she is. I liked that I had made them laugh, and that I had made an important observation.

Christmases in the nice house by the beach, where the Christmas tree was always big and decorated with colorful glass lights and decorations and the presents were many and always in twos, one for each of us, Vanessa and myself, but the colors were different. When Vanessa got a dressing gown with red and white stripes, mine had pink and white stripes. When Vanessa, a

brunette, got a walkie-talkie doll with blond hair; I, a blond, got one with brunette hair. Though this annoyed me a little, we had a lot of fun together, Vanessa and I. I learned at a very young age the usefulness of ambiguity.

I looked in awe at Yvonne's very large bottle of Worth perfume and her expensive clothes and high heeled shoes. Vanessa and I would each get a dab of Worth behind our ears for special outings, like the Pantomime, or the Breach Candy Christmas party. My mother sewed all her own clothes, out of printed cotton fabric bought by the yard from the cloth shops in Bangalore, and had no expensive perfume. When she could get it, she would buy herself a bottle of Yardley's English Lavender.

I stopped having to go to Daddy and Yvonne's for Christmas after I was about seven; Yvonne decided she didn't want me around anymore, I think. I made a fuss over her cooking; when she did cook, which was not often, it was quite awful. One evening for dinner she proudly presented a Burmese dish called Khow Suey. Yvonne was Anglo-Burmese. I took a taste from my plate, made a face and declared it tasted horrid. Yvonne got up from the table and ran crying to the bedroom. I was not punished though.

Daddy got a new court order that made my mother put me in boarding school, in the same school I used to walk to every day, up the hill and through the woods. I was a boarder for about two years, or maybe three, and though I cried a lot the first night after Daddy and Yvonne had left me at the school, I later came to think it quite fun, if a little silly. Mummy used to visit me on weekends, bringing some special dish she had cooked just for me. Once it was roast pigeon, which was very tasty. I loved roast pigeon. The nuns at the school occasionally allowed me to spend the weekend at home with Mummy; they felt sorry for us. On one such weekend the cook

came back from the market with the week's worth of purchases; among them was a live pigeon, with white and beige feathers. I named it Pidgie and it never made it to the pot.

The battle for custody of me was never resolved until Daddy's lawyer inadvertently mentioned in court that his client had obtained himself a Mexican divorce, whereupon the Judge said, "Then what are we doing here? This case is closed; the child is now old enough to decide who she wants to live with."

The long wide curved stone staircase of the Bombay High Court is etched in my brain; the lawyers with their crisp white collars and flowing black robes with bundles of depositions tucked under their arms as they walked either up or down the stairs and the hushed hallways of the court house, where you could smell the desperation mixed with the dust.

Then there was the time when I was very little, perhaps no more than three I think, when the presiding judge at the time took me aside to his chambers, stood me between his knees and asked me, "Tell me child, who do you want to live with, Mummy or Daddy?" I looked up into his face and said, "Mummy," hopefully, but it didn't seem to matter, because the case dragged on for years afterwards, until the Mexican divorce, by which time I was fourteen, or fifteen. I had not heard from Daddy for seven years by then. I remember a game I used to play, sitting alone on the swing at school: I would look up at a flock of crows in the sky and, quickly, before I could see how many there were, I would tell myself "eight I can live with Mummy; nine I have to live with Daddy." Then I would count the crows. The answer never mattered either. This was my own variation of the game we all played as children when we saw a flock of crows, we would count them and recite this rhyme: One for sorrow, Two for mirth, Three for a wedding, Four for a birth, Five for silver, Six for gold, Seven for a secret not to be told, Eight for heaven, Nine for hell, And Ten for the devil's own sell! This is what counting crows really means.

When I was seventeen, Daddy suddenly re-appeared in my life and I made peace with Daddy and Yvonne. I went to visit them in Juhu, Bombay, in the same house near the beach. Vanessa was there, and we got along rather well. She called me her sister then. I thought it odd because I had thought of her as my sister, I think, since we were very little, but I said nothing. She called my Daddy "Papa"; she used to call him Uncle Al. Vanessa was sent away to London, to live with her aunt, and start her own life, when she was about nineteen. During the year or so we were together, before she left, we got into a great deal of mischief together; we were co-conspirators in driving Papa to distraction, always a step ahead of him. Coming home later than allowed from a night out in Bombay with our boyfriends, we would stop the car at the bottom of the sandy street and push it silently the rest of the way up the street into the garage, and climb in through our bedroom window, having loosened one of the grills just enough to swivel and squeeze through.

I was sent away to the USA, to college in Portland, Oregon, a year or so later. Daddy said he would send me an air ticket to come home for summer vacation. When my freshman year was drawing to an end, I wrote and reminded him about the air ticket. He wrote back, saying that I was mad; I ought to get a summer job, he said. Father Van at college got me a job as a cabin maid on a Dude Ranch in Wyoming for the summer. Flying into Jackson Hole airport in a tiny plane, it seemed as if the mountains were just inches away from the wingtips on both sides of the plane as we descended into the valley. It was beautiful out there at the ranch on the Snake River, in the valley near the Grand Teton Mountains, which were given their name by a Frenchman who decided the three peaks, standing side by side, looked like three breasts. Teton is French for breast. Jackson Lake, at the foot of the Tetons, freezes over in winter, and begins its thaw as the weather warms in spring with a tremendously loud crack that sounds like thunder

as it reverberates through the valley. The thaw began soon after I arrived; it was a magnificent sound, that first crack of the lake ice. Sunbathing by myself one day by the river in July, it started to snow: big fat snowflakes fell out of the sky and covered everything in an hour. The flakes were so big you could hear them fall, with big soft huffs. I had signed up for a year's study abroad program at college for my sophomore year and would leave for Europe in the fall. I stuck it out at the Dude Ranch, cleaning cabins, until I fell in love and ran away with a cowboy named Mike who lived with his dog Charlie in an old yellow school bus he'd converted into a mobile home. It had a gas stove and a bed by the back window, which was actually a door. We drove around Wyoming and Montana for the remainder of the summer, fishing for trout, parking the bus wherever our fancy took us, camping here and there, bathing in icy cold streams fed by snow melt, waking up at dawn to the sight of moose in a meadow at the edge of a forest, meeting odd people, introducing ourselves on at least one occasion as Mr. and Mrs. White, until I had to leave for Europe. That was the summer I learned to cook trout, freshly caught, cleaned and shaken in a brown paper bag with flour, salt and pepper and fried in an old pan over a wood fire.

I stayed on in Europe for the summer after my sophomore year, Daddy again refusing to send me a once-again promised air ticket to come home for summer vacation. Not wanting to come back to the USA at the end of summer, I parlayed my summer job at the bank in Frankfurt/Main into a permanent job. Daddy called me a college drop-out. Daddy had finally succeeded in getting me away from my mother. I did, however, manage to visit my family in my various homes – Mummy, Daddy and Yvonne, Granny and Grandpa – for Christmas in 1975. Three years later I moved back to the USA, to finish college, having tired of Daddy calling me a college drop-out. I ended up in California.

By May 1984 I have not seen my parents in nine long years, and spoken to them on the telephone only rarely. Telephone connections via the Trans-Atlantic cable were less than ideal. You had to wait for the echo of your own voice to subside before you could hear the person at the other end of the line. (Those were letter-writing years: I wrote long and frequent letters to my families, the longest ones to my mother, full of amusing details of my adventures and experiences. I received letters in return, matching the frequency of my own).

I spend the first two weeks in Bombay with Daddy and Yvonne; the house is grim, Kitty, the family Bull Terrier, is obviously deeply depressed. I have never seen a depressed dog before this. Yvonne is largely hysterical and has found religion: she has been Born Again. She looks old and worn. Florie is still there, cooking and cleaning. She cooks my favorite Goa fish curry; I watch her grind the masala out back, breathing in the scent of milky coconut and bright red chilies. Daddy has given up on his factory, the Alexander Morse Company, where he manufactured tools and dyes and pharmaceutical machinery for much of my life, allowing his factory supervisor Ayoub to run the operations. He sits at home all day, starting out the day over the newspapers, coffee and cigarettes, moving on to books, and more cigarettes, and beer, and to rum by sundown until dinner and bedtime. His blond hair has turned sparse and his skin looks grey. He appears resigned and philosophical and wryly remarks to me: "We deserve each other," after Yvonne dashes off to her bedroom following a spectacular bout of hysteria over something he has said. He has, I can see, driven her relentlessly and deliberately over the edge. I remember incidents from a distant childhood, when Yvonne would run away from home, regularly. Though they were not yet married, she always came back. Every time she ran away, I hoped she

would never come back, thinking my own mother would then come back and we'd all live happily ever after. But she always came back, Yvonne did.

Before I leave for the south, to visit Mummy in the Nilgiris, and Granny in Whitefield (Grandpa died in 1983 at the age of 92), we go on one memorable outing, the three of us together, to Powai Lake, on the outskirts of Bombay to fish, and to visit an old friend of Daddy's, who was once the Consul General of Belgium in Bombay. Daddy refers to him as The Count. The Count could not bring himself to leave the country after his wife died; she was buried in a cemetery in Bombay and so he stayed. I remember he lived in the house across the street in Juhu in 1975; he had a flock of chickens that went to roost in the trees. When he tired of trying to round up his chickens, he'd shoot a couple down with his rifle, calling out "Pâté!" in triumph as each bird fell to the ground with a thud. The Count and his son Marc now live in a quiet old house on the banks of Powai Lake. Daddy, I learn, has been on many a fishing trip with The Count since he'd moved to the house on the lake. The day before we leave for the lake, Daddy gathers his battered old fishing gear and mixes up a bucket of the smelliest bait designed to catch Catla, an Indian freshwater game fish. The Royal Bombay yacht club has a stuffed Catla caught by Mr M.J.Hamilton in 1957 weighing 42 ½ pounds. Anders and I had visited The Royal Bombay yacht club in 1972.

We pack the old Fiat and leave early in the morning. It is high summer and the monsoons have not yet arrived. This is flowering season for most Indian trees. Bordering the lake and surrounding the quiet old house are several very old and large Flame of the Forest trees, in full and glorious bloom, the ground under them covered with an orange carpet of fallen blossoms. Bright orange glows both overhead and underfoot. Here and there are Jacarandas, their purple blossoms, like the other trees, also overhead and underfoot. Here and there are

towering stands of bamboo. We row around in a small boat and catch no fish, but I take many photographs, of the trees, the lake, and of my father, hamming it up on the small jetty at the edge of the lake. I do not remember if Yvonne is in any of the photographs; perhaps she did not come with us after all. Perhaps she stayed inside the house with The Count, who does not come with us out onto the lake. I also do not have any photographs of The Count, or of his son Marc, but I remember them both, with considerable fondness, especially for The Count, who has a wry wit and wisdom that sometimes comes to men with age and equal measures of joy and sorrow. Marc, who must be the same age as I am, has a quiet gentleness about him.

Flying into Bangalore from Bombay, I head straight up by bus to the Nilgiris, to my mother. I am Home. My mother and I are both equally delighted to see each other. We hug each other close, the feeling and fragrance of her body a memory as old as I am. We spend a few days in Ooty, in the Nilgiris; I get to know the staff and children in her little boarding school. There are two very young women whom she has taken under her wing and who work for her as school matrons, Ratna and Vineeta. She takes me to visit her friends, old Lynn and his wife Siloo, KV and his wife, who loves to cook, and their son and daughter. The children in my mother's boarding school have not yet left for the summer holidays. When they do, we drive down to Bangalore in mother's little silver-blue Herald, taking the steep Sighur Ghat road to Masinagudi, where we stop at the Mudumalai Jungle Game Reserve. We stay at a government guest house for a few days.

The jungle is heavy with the pre-monsoon cacophony of cicadas, and the rising and falling crescendo of the call of the Brain Fever Bird. We sit on the verandah and my mother feeds the monkeys; two sit on the arm of her chair and take tidbits from her hand. I take photographs, of her, the monkeys, the guesthouse watchman, the river below. We go on an

elephant ride through the jungle, get charged by a young wild tusker; our mahout gives our elephant, an old tusker named Mudumalai an order in the local Irula tribal language, and he pulls up a young sapling, beats it on the ground, utters a low rumble and takes a threatening step forward. The young tusker bows his head and retreats to his herd, leading them off into the jungle. We continue on our two hour ride through the jungle, returning eventually to the elephant camp where we reward Mudumalai with sugarcane. He lifts his trunk in salute.

A selection of significant events, as the year, 1984, continues:

June 5 – The Indian government, under Prime Minister Indira Ghandi, begins Operation Blue Star, the planned attack on the Golden Temple in Amritsar after two years of agitation by Sikh separatist militants. (In July 1982, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, the head of the Dam Dami Taxsal – the Sikh religious institution based in the northern Indian state of Punjab – led a campaign for the implementation of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution for the Khalistan separatist movement. Their demand: a separate Sikh state within the Punjab, to be named Khalistan. Bhindranwale accumulated a massive supply of firearms and explosives and began recruiting supporters, with Indian news reports stating they had near total control of the Punjab. In a controversial move, Bhindranwale and his men occupied the Golden Temple, and began fortifying it). Indira Gandhi orders Bhindranwale to lay down his arms but he refuses.

June 6 – The Indian Army, on Indira Ghandi's orders, storm the Golden Temple – the holiest of Sikh temples – during one of the holiest Sikh holidays. Bhindranwale and his militants meet the army with reckless resistance and are massacred. The State of Punjab is closed to international media, Sikh devotees, human rights organizations, and other groups during the period. To this day, the events remain controversial and the number of victims – by some

estimates, 2,000 people – are disputed. While the Sikhs' highest authority perceive him as having made the supreme sacrifice for the sake of faith, and see the attack as unjustified, the Indian government and much of the general populace – including the moderate majority of the Sikh community – view Bhindranwale as a misguided militant. Nevertheless, this bodes ill; the militant Sikh faction now has a new crop of martyrs.

After about a week spent in the jungles, Mummy and I drive on to Whitefield to visit Granny. Granny is lost and bewildered since Grandpa died the year before. Mummy tells me Granny ate, in one sitting, the entire package of Swiss chocolate I had mailed her from Germany, where I had stopped over briefly to visit my old friends Uschi and Klaus on my way to India. There were I think, about two kilos of chocolate in that package. Grandpa was the first great love of my life. As a child I would sit on his lap every night before dinner in the house in Whitefield and he would tell me stories, lots of stories, and never the same one twice: stories of the jungles, of people and animals and insects, stories of his time in the British Civil Service when he travelled around from outpost to outpost, with his family and their belongings in a convoy of bullock carts. Grandpa introduced me to Rudyard Kipling, P.G. Wodehouse, Charles Dickens, Jim Corbett and his man-eating tigers, and King Solomon who had seven hundred wives and seven hundred concubines, and the Trap-Door spider. Grandpa wrote in his diaries after dinner his entire life; there was a whole stack of them in the bottom of the big teak almirah[5] in Granny and Grandpa's bedroom. When Mummy wrote to tell me in 1983 that Grandpa had died, I wrote back and asked her to please ask Granny to keep Grandpa's diaries for me: I wanted to write a book about his life. It was such an interesting life. In Whitefield now, with Granny

[5] British Indian (Indian English); from Hindi or Urdu *almārī*, from Portuguese *armário*, from Latin *armarium*, meaning cupboard or wardrobe.

addled, and Grandpa's side of the bed empty, I ask Mummy about the diaries. She tells me Granny burnt them all. Up in smoke, just like Grandpa, all those diaries, all Grandpa's stories. I am horrified and heartsick; I can still, all these years later, see the ghosts of those diaries in that big almirah, along with Grandpa's shirts and trousers hanging above them. I can smell them too, the leather and the cardboard and the paper, with Grandpa's distinctive writing in blue fountain-pen ink. Granny's act seems heartless, if not calculated. Though I loved her as a child, my love was laced with ambivalence even then. She had a mean streak that would unmask itself in countless little ways. She also grumbled incessantly. Mummy pointed out she was entitled to the grumbling, given the hardships she faced as a wife and mother in the wilds of India, reminding me how difficult life must have been, moving from outpost to outpost, with three small children in a convoy of bullock carts.

We spend a sad few days with Granny, who wakes up at odd hours of the night, every night, calling for her daughter, "*Jewel?"* Mummy is very patient. The house is bleak; most of the furniture is gone; what Granny hasn't sold, has been stolen by the neighbor's servants, and sold by them. The oval-matted picture of the Afghan Sniper is still on the dining room wall. The caption reads "The Sniper – Northwest Frontier."[6] It is an attractive, strangely dreamy picture, of a handsome young man in Afghan clothing, crouched behind a rock, with his jezail held up to

[6] Years later, when I'm in the USA, long after the picture has disintegrated beyond repair, I search the internet for Afghan snipers, hoping to find a reproduction of the original painting, with no success. Then, in a Graduate Liberal Studies class at Duke University in 2012, "Photography in Context," memories of the sniper draw me into exploring R.B. Holmes' photographs of the Anglo-Afghan War, 1910-1919. I do not find the sniper but when I go back to the internet with R.B. Holmes' name and the Third Afghan War as part of a new search, I'm delighted to find a photograph by Holmes, the close resemblance of which to the painting is unmistakable. I never do find the painting, but I now know the unknown artist's inspiration was that photograph by Randolph Bezzant Holmes: "'The Sniper', an Afridi tribesman from the Khyber, 1920 (c)."

one eye, aimed menacingly down into the plains below, with the wild mountainous terrain of Afghanistan as his backdrop. I spent many childhood hours daydreaming about Afghanistan, the sniper, and the Northwest Frontier. And Granny told stories: one of her older brothers, my great uncle Christian Muller was a surgeon in the British army, in Afghanistan, during one of the Anglo-Afghan wars. I want to take the picture with me but the frame is too large. Mummy takes it down off the wall and cuts the picture out of its oval matting. I pack it in my suitcase between two sheets of cardboard. Granny doesn't mind.

We try to cheer Granny up, drive her into Bangalore, take her shopping, to a movie, to her favorite restaurant, Koshy's, where we order what we always have: Masala Dosais – those crisp, rice-and-lentil crepes folded around a spicy yellow potato and onion filling – served with coconut chutney on the side. Granny likes being driven around in a car. She spent many years having to take the bus into Bangalore once a week to buy the week's worth of provisions, fighting with the crowds to get back on the return bus loaded down with sacks of rice, chicken feed, vegetables, mutton, a live chicken for Sunday dinner, and a string of fat fresh Oxford sausages from the Ham Shop under the staircase next to Glenand's Pharmacy on South Parade. Granny is briefly happy.

Mummy and I drive back up to the hills, to Ooty. Granny doesn't want to come with us; she wants to stay in Whitefield, by herself, with our old ayah[7] who has been with us since I was a little girl. Ayah's name is Mercy. This time we take the route through Mysore, where we stop at

[7] Ayah [Hindi and Urdu āyā, from Portuguese aia, nursemaid, from Latin avia, grandmother; see awo- in Indo-European roots], is a word common to several languages in the East, Africa, and other parts of the former British Empire: a maidservant, nursemaid, or governess, esp one of Indian or Malay origin.

all the old bus stops on the bus route between Ooty and Bangalore. During my growing-up years Mummy and I used to travel between Ooty and Bangalore by bus; for many years she had no car after she had to sell the big Ford because she couldn't afford to keep it. It was an eight hour bus journey then; the bus stops were interesting places, with interesting things to eat, colorful wooden toys to buy, silkworm cocoons to pick out of the baskets of the vendors, or to watch as the old men showed how to spin a strand of yellow silk off a cocoon. I would take a few cocoons home with us if we were on the way to Whitefield, where I'd put them in a shoe box with mulberry leaves and wait for them to hatch. The only trouble with the bus stops were the toilets: they had Indian-style keyhole commodes with foot rests on either side; you squatted over them to do your business. There was usually a lot of other people's business already in, and sometimes little piles around, the keyhole toilets, sometimes great big piles, especially if it was late in the day and the "sweeper" hadn't done his or her rounds yet. Most often there was no flush, or if there was one, it didn't have water in it. Always there were flies. You opened the creaky door, held your breath and got on with it. We don't have to use the toilets this time since we are in a car; we stop when we have to, by the roadside and go behind the bushes, keeping an eye out for snakes.

Back in Ooty, I tell Mummy about Daddy and Yvonne, about Yvonne's hysterics, and Daddy's rueful "We deserve each other" statement. She looks happy – vindication after all these years perhaps? I also say, thinking out loud, "Just think, Mummy, if you had stayed married to Daddy, you would not have taught all those children over the years since you left him. So many children, many of whom no one else could teach; so many lives changed." I watch her as her eyes seem to light up from deep within. Not that this absolves my father from causing all

the hardship and suffering meted out to her during those long years in court, I think to myself, but nevertheless, the pain and suffering though a heavy price to pay, were worth a great deal, in the end, perhaps.

By early August, it is time to leave for Bombay, to spend the remainder of my allotted time with Daddy and Yvonne. My mother sees me off at the Ooty bus stand. I can see her still, as the bus drives away, standing at the side of the road, waving, tears streaming down her face. I have never seen her cry before. This is a photograph with no photograph, every detail etched in my mind like a full-color lithograph.

Mid-August I leave Bombay, heading back to the USA; Daddy and Yvonne see me off at the airport. I do not remember the details; there are no pictures in my mind of this.

August 29 – in Amstetten, a small town in Austria, Josef Fritzl drugs and incarcerates his daughter Elisabeth in a special soundproof dungeon he has secretly built just for this in the cellar of the family home; he had been abusing her since 1977 when she was 11 years old. (She is freed in 2008 after 24 years of sexual and emotional abuse, after having born him seven children during her captivity, and the world recoils in horror as her story comes to light. It takes twenty-four years before the world knows what befell her on August 29, 1984. Reading about this, twenty-four years later, in 2008, I do not remember the date has another significance attached to it. It takes another three years before I recall that this is the date on which one event in my own life sets in motion an intricately intertwined series of changes that affect not just myself, but everyone then in my immediate circle as well as others yet to come). The sun shines, and then it doesn't. Granted, the curious twists of my own fate by no stretch match Elisabeth's horrors, but still, the sun shines, and then it doesn't.

While on my return to the USA, having stopped over in England to spend a couple weeks with my stepsister Vanessa and her family I receive a telephone call from India, informing me that my mother has had a stroke and is not expected to live. The date is August 29th.

My world instantaneously implodes into an indescribable bottomless black hole of immeasurable grief. My mother, who had raised me alone since I was two and a half, whose very existence, no matter at what geographical distance, had always represented Home, my one constant source of solace and security, with whom I had just spent half of three blissfully happy months, and who had seemed perfectly healthy, is suddenly on the verge of imminent extinction. Vanessa accompanies me to London where I attempt to get a return visa to India at the Indian Embassy. Filling out the requisite forms, I state my reason for the request: mother seriously ill; not expected to live. After waiting in line for several hours, I arrive at the counter and my form is scrutinized; the Indian official, his face a mask of scorn, and derision, demurs: "Why do you want to return to India? You just came from there, after a three month visit?" Struck speechless, another wave of grief washing over me, drowning, I burst into uncontrollable tears, again. Vanessa intervenes and explains that my mother is dying; it says so on the form. Only my tears, the sight of my public grief, apparently incontrovertible evidence of the truth, convince the Indian authorities to issue the return, "tourist visa." It takes a week to get the visa; a week during which I – relinquishing myself with total abandon to Grief – find that I am transported to an altered state. There are people around me, but they appear to exist on another plane, separate and apart from my own reality. Vanessa helps me navigate the shoals of random interpersonal relationships during that week by explaining the shell-shocked expression on my face and the frequent, silent tears that catch in my throat and prevent me from speaking for myself. "She has just lost her Mother," she repeats patiently, to everyone we encounter who look quizzically at

me, this mute refugee from nobody-knows-where – the hairdresser, the bus driver, the girl in the shop.

September 6 – My mother, Julia Janet Mary Momot, (neé Roze) dies at age sixty-two, in the little government hospital up on a hill in Ooty. By the time I get to India, my mother is dead and buried, her friend and attorney KV having taken care of immediate matters, including her funeral. It was KV who had contacted my father who had contacted me through Vanessa with news of her stroke.

Travelling via a series of planes, stopping first briefly in Bombay where I spend a night and a day with my father and Yvonne – both solicitous of my grief-stricken state – and finally a bus up into the Nilgiri Hills[8] in south India, I arrive at the little boarding school she ran in Ooty. I have regained my composure and my voice, out of necessity. I am greeted tearfully by Ratna, who has stayed on, and by Mercy Ayah and Granny. Granny swings between periods of awareness and disbelief over her daughter's death. I am told that all the coolies in the market attended her funeral, as well as many of the vegetable vendors, the butchers, the fish monger… I go alone to St. Thomas' churchyard to visit her grave. The mound of earth is very fresh. I look up and see the lake below, where she and I used to fish for carp from its banks at dusk when I was a young girl, among the arum lilies under towering gum trees, as the hoot owl flew silently over us, I am very alone, and very lost.

There is nothing to do now but to get on with it. I set about putting her affairs in order. There are staff, teachers and servants to be paid off, tuition and boarding fees to be reimbursed, and boxes and steel trunks containing the detritus of her life to be sorted through. Many of the boxes have been invaded by rats, mice and ants and the contents demolished or stained by rodent

[8] "Nilgiri" means Blue Mountains in Hindi: the towering mountain range appears blue from a distance. The elevation at Ooty is 7,500 ft above MSL.

urine. There are large white ant eggs and little black rolls of rat shit scattered profusely among chewed and shredded stacks of papers. It is laborious work but it keeps me occupied, from breakfast to dinner with a short break for lunch and tea, I keep going, day after day. I am not alone in this, however. I find I have a friend in Ratna. Her name is Sanskrit for "Jewel" or "Gem." She calls me Wendymiss, with the last syllable rising at the end, as if it were a question. Alongside me, she rootles through the baggage of my mother's life; I take a photograph of her sitting among the trunks and boxes, playing on an old harmonica we find in a collection of my old toys. The sun is very bright that day, catching the shine in Ratna's dark hair, casting shadows from her eyelashes on her cheeks. We go for very long walks through the woods early in the morning, on many mornings, exploring an old road that has long since petered out into a grass covered track that follows the contours of the hills and emerges at an unexpected destination at the other end – Fingerpost – the far end of Ooty valley. The woods, known as sholas here, are cool and lush, the ground under the old-growth trees covered in countless species of mosses, ferns and lichens; walking through them, breathing in the earthy smell of it all, provides us both with comfort. We laugh whenever we see a Nilgiri wagtail magpie walking on the ground, tail bobbing: Ratna has named the species "Kundi Aati Kuruvi" in Tamil, which translates literally into "Arse-Dancing Bird."

I visit Lynn and Siloo, who live up the road, and KV and his family, who live down the road. Both couples provide differing forms of solace and comfort. Lynn tells stories of the old, old Ooty as we sit by the fire. He was a Colonel in the British Army. His wealth of knowledge and his collection of books never fail to amaze, educate and amuse. KV tells me stories of my mother. It is he who tells me that all the coolies in the Ooty market went to my mother's funeral. Ratna tells me about the day my mother had the stroke, how she was alone in her bathroom – the

little bathroom with a corrugated tin roof and walls, and a polished terracotta tiled floor, that she had had built on a shoestring budget – the bathroom that had a proper claw-foot tub and a sink and a toilet with a flush that worked, but which was freezing cold in the winter. She had had a bath, and then someone in the house heard a crash. They had to break down the door, which wasn't really difficult, and found her unconscious on the floor. When I was with her in August, the Tibuchina tree out by the back door of the bathroom was in bloom, its big, single-petaled deep purple flowers startling in their size and color, as always. Mother stood in the doorway feeding the birds; she held her hand out, palm up, filled with breadcrumbs. Little birds flew down to eat from her outstretched hand.

Day follows day and (looking back I no longer remember precisely when, but it must have been mid-October), an old friend of my mother's, Florie (another Florie), comes to visit, to pay her condolences. We sit in my mother's sitting room, the only room I have not taken apart or packed up yet. She has brought her son Kenny and his wife Joan with her. Kenny is a Tea Planter – he manages one of a group of Tea Estates owned by the Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation, Ltd., (B.B.T.C. Ltd.), up in the Anamalais, a vast swath of tea-growing country up in a range of hills named in Tamil for the wild elephants that have been frequenting their centuries-old migratory routes; routes that now include the tea fields where jungles once stood. The range is part of the southern portion of the Western Ghats. The British brought tea to India, the East India Company establishing Tea Plantations and an entire way of life around them. Kenny and Joan invite me up to the Plantations for a week – "bring Granny with you; take a break, it will do you good; bring Ayah too."

So we go, Granny and Ayah and I. It is a glorious drive. Down 7,500 feet from the Nilgiris, through the dusty plains and small villages, past sprawling Coimbatore[9] (neither city, town nor village but a mix of all three, in my memory), and then, suddenly, there you are, at the foot of the Anamalai range looking straight up a massive, almost vertical, jungle-covered rock face. There are forty one hairpin bends on the road up to the top. It is another world up there: rolling hills covered with tea fields as far as the eye can see; clean, green and fresh. There is one small village, Valparai, before we get to the estate Kenny manages. The old plantation bungalow Kenny and Joan live in is on top of a hill, clean, polished and spotless and like every other plantation bungalow, it comes with a retinue of servants to keep it in that condition. Granny and I are both instantly soothed as we arrive and climb out of the car under the portico. We are shown to the guest bedroom where we make ourselves comfortable and freshen up for afternoon tea. Later that evening, Kenny and Joan tell me they have invited a friend over to dinner, the manager from a neighboring estate. Dinner, on every plantation, does not take place before a round or several of pre-dinner drinks. The sound of a car driving up to the portico announces their friend's arrival around eight o'clock. We are all sitting on the large back verandah when he walks in. The night air is lush with the smell of the tea fields, the flowers in the garden, and the polish on the gleaming terracotta tiles of the verandah; there are moths flying around the lights, beating themselves blindly against the glass shades, doomed to die before the night is out.

"Wendy, meet our friend Jimmy."

We shake hands. He is not exceedingly tall – about the same height as my father, and my grandfather, about 5 ft. 8 inches. He is, nevertheless, tall, dark and handsome, and smells just

[9] Coimbatore is believed to have been named after a 12th century Irula chieftain called Koyan. In the 17th century, the city became a part of the Kingdom of Mysore and remained so until its conquest by the British East India Company in 1799. The history of modern Coimbatore, however, dates from the 1930s, when the city grew rapidly, capitalizing on a textile boom.

right: a blend of rum, tobacco, and a faint whiff of imported cologne. The smell of him seeps into my subconscious and lodges itself firmly there, tucked into every necessary sensory receptor. There is an unmistakable look in his eyes, an expression I am all too familiar with, but which never fails to please. I am thirty-two and much travelled. The expression is the same in any language, on any continent. The conversation flows easily around tea plantations and elephants. My grief, overwhelming for so long, gratefully retreats into the background; it is a relief to find I can put it aside in this place so far removed from all that is familiar.

Dinner over, the evening drawing to a close; goodnights are said. Jimmy offers to show me around the estates the next day. Early next morning in the pre-dawn darkness, I am awakened by a loud and aimless but quite musical whistling; I think it's Kenny, up early, whistling happily to himself out on the verandah and am startled and amused. Jimmy arrives after breakfast on a motorcycle, another staple of the plantations: a Royal Enfield Bullet 500cc classic. I am entranced, and an anticipatory tingle rises up my spine as I climb onto the pillion behind him after he kick-starts the engine.

It was the early 1950s when India started ordering Royal Enfield Bullets from England for police and army use as they had served the British well during WWII. The British Enfield Cycle Company was a division of the Royal Small Arms Factory, a weapons manufacturing company that branched out into manufacturing motorcycles, bicycles, lawnmowers and stationary engines – thus the Royal Enfield Company was born in 1890. In 1955 Madras Motors of India bought the right to use the Royal Enfield name to form Enfield of India. In 1957 the tooling was sold to Madras Motors to start manufacturing components. By 1962 complete bikes were rolling off the Indian assembly lines. By 1971 Royal Enfield of England was defunct. Today, the Royal Enfield Bullet still retains the looks and rugged demeanor of its predecessor,

including the legacy of the Royal Small Arms Company with the logo of a cannon and the slogan "*MADE LIKE A GUN*" stamped on every motorcycle. This rugged motorcycle was a natural choice for use on the plantations.

Weighing in at a little over 400 lbs, and requiring a very deliberate and serious kick-start sequence to get it started, no other motorcycle in the world can match the deep, heavy rumble of a Royal Enfield Bullet's engine, especially at a leisurely twenty-five miles an hour on a single-lane road winding through the hills of a tea plantation. This is a bike built for a slow ride, meant to enjoy the scenery. Unlike those fancy new-fangled motorbikes that have the passenger seat sticking up in the air at an odd angle higher than the driver's seat, the Bullet's passenger seat sits tight behind the driver, at the same level. Whether you wish to or not, riding pillion ensures you are seated just so: body leaning against body, chin at the level of the driver's shoulder. Wearing no helmet or goggles, this is motorcycling as total immersion – the wind blowing against your face and through your hair, the smell of everything lingering in your nostrils – from the jasmine in a village woman's hair, to the acrid diesel exhaust of a lorry up ahead, from the just-fired batch of tea emanating from a tea factory on a hill, to the earthy whiff of fresh elephant dung. Jimmy drives me around the estates, pointing out the sights: rows of women plucking tea in one field, cardamom fields in the hollows between the hills where the swamps are drained by herringbone ditches, pepper vines growing up the shade trees among the cardamom, and, on top of a hill, a herd of wild elephants. We keep our distance, coming to a halt and shutting off the engine; wild elephants are dangerous if provoked. This herd has a few calves among the adults. They carry on about their business, moving ponderously through the tea fields, not causing much damage this time, beyond uprooting a few tea bushes to shake the damp soil over themselves and scratch their backs.

We visit other estates, over the course of the next week. The loud, quixotic, startlingly clear pre-dawn whistling wakes me every morning. When my curiosity emboldens me enough to remark about Kenny's early morning whistling sessions, I learn it's not Kenny, but a bird called the Whistling Schoolboy – the Malabar Whistling Thrush. The sound is indistinguishable from a human's tuneful whistling, and hangs quite madly in the morning air. Every estate bungalow in the Anamalais has at least one Whistling Schoolboy that has taken up residence on a verandah.

There is no rush to return to Ooty. We are invited to dinner at a couple other plantations where the tables are always laden with food, the guests dressed in their very best, the ladies in their bright silk sarees, the gentlemen in suits; laughter and small talk flowing as easily and abundantly as the liquor. There is always too much food left over, which, if the lady of the house is kind enough, is shared with the servants.

October 23 – The world learns from moving BBC News TV reports that a famine is plaguing Ethiopia, where thousands of people have already died of starvation due to a famine and as many as 10,000,000 more lives are at risk. On the tea plantations, we are not exposed to pictures of starving children. There is as yet no satellite television, and the news we get is limited to newspapers and radio broadcasts, including BBC shortwave radio. Ethiopia is very far away.

A week more goes by. I have learned that Jimmy is forty-one and has been married before. He has two children, a boy of sixteen, and a girl of thirteen. His first wife caused a scandal by having an affair with an assistant manager on another estate, of another company. It is time that I return to Ooty, to finish up my bleak task. There are still matters to attend to at my

mother's school, and Granny is getting restless; she wants to go home to Whitefield. It is also time for me to get away from this paradise and gather my thoughts. I have come to think I am in love; in the midst of grief, this brings great relief. We prepare to leave. Jimmy arranges for a driver to drive us in his car back to Ooty.

October 31 – India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi is assassinated. At nine o'clock in the morning, as she walks down to a security gate at her residence, she folds her hands in the customary Indian greeting to her two Sikh bodyguards at the gate, and says *Namaste.* One bodyguard pulls out his service revolver and fires three shots. He gets her in the abdomen and she crumples to the ground. The other bodyguard turns his Sten gun on her, emptying the entire magazine, thirty rounds. She had been advised against keeping the Sikh bodyguards after Operation Blue Star, but she'd insisted. Anti-Sikh riots break out all over the country; the news reports say the riots are in the North, around Delhi. On this morning, up in the plantations, none of this is as yet known to us. We leave for Ooty. We do not get very far before we are stopped by an agitated plantation field supervisor and his staff. They advise us to turn around and return to the bungalow. The field supervisor tells us that Coimbatore and all the villages on the road both before and beyond it are in flames. We are far south of Delhi.

An angered and largely illiterate populace, emotions out of control, as always in this country in times of communal vengeance, unleashes its wrath upon innocent representatives of the offending class or caste or religion; in this instance, the recipients are Sikhs in general, as well as anyone who gets in the way. All over India there is killing, burning, maiming, pillaging. The urgent necessity of dispensing with the Sikh turban, if you are a man and a Sikh, becomes

immediately apparent. So begins the time of the Shorn Sikh, for under his turban, a Sikh's hair is allowed to grow long, and is never to be cut.

Forced to return to the plantations and unable to leave, love takes firm hold of my senses; Jimmy asks me to marry him and I accept.

November 4 – While on the plantations, I receive word that my father has died of a stroke. Yvonne tells me she found him in the morning on the floor with a smile on his face, dead; he had rolled out of bed in the middle of the night. My father, Alexander Eovitch Momot, who grew up in Brooklyn NY, the middle of three surviving sons born to Ukrainian immigrants from a village near Kiev, was sixty-four. I am unable to make it to the funeral. It is a five hour drive to the nearest airport and the next flight to Bombay is not until the next day. Yvonne seems not to understand when I try to explain this. I have no grief left to spare for my father; I spent it all on my mother. I hear his voice though, his deep baritone singing the Song of the Volga Boatman in Russian, as he accompanies himself on the grand piano in the living room in Juhu. My father could play any musical instrument he picked up. My favorite by far was the accordion, the massive Wurlitzer, on which he played all the Old Russian, Ukrainian and Cossack folksongs. When he played Kalinka, I would always ask him, "Play it again please Daddy." His greatest loss was the balalaika[10] he left behind in Brooklyn, when he set out for the North African and Middle Eastern Theatres of World War II on a contract with Grumman Aircraft. The contract eventually took him to Bangalore, India, in 1943, where he worked with

[10] The balalaika (Russian: балала́йка) is a Russian stringed musical instrument with a characteristic triangular body and three strings. A plausible reason for the triangular shape is given by the writer and historian Nikolai Gogol in his unfinished novel Dead Souls. He states that a balalaika was made by peasants out of a pumpkin. If you quarter a pumpkin, you are left with a balalaika shape.

Hindustan Aircraft, testing jet engines. While stationed in Bangalore, he met and fell in love with a shy young woman with hair the color of jungle honey at the annual May Queen Ball at the Bowring Institute[11]. They were married at St. Mark's Cathedral two years later. Though he did briefly return to Brooklyn with his bride, the balalaika was once again, somehow, lost to posterity. The young couple returned to India with a baby, but without the balalaika.

Eventually able to return to Ooty after the mayhem has died down, down below in the plains, I continue tying up loose ends. I put Granny on a bus bound for Bangalore with Mercy Ayah who, graying and of slowed demeanor, is no longer young. I worry how they will manage alone in Whitefield, but Granny insists she wants to go home.

December 3 – The Bhopal Disaster: A methyl isocyanate leak from Union Carbide's pesticide plant in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India, kills more than 8,000 people, and injures over half a million (with more later dying from their injuries the death toll is now over 23,000). It is the worst industrial disaster in history. Bhopal is far away from the plantations, and from Ooty; the news affects no one I know.

As the month wears on, I finish packing those of my mother's things I must keep – her linens, china, books, the rosewood furniture she had made at St. Josephs' school for blind boys, and her collection of records, among them a considerable selection of Russian classical music:

[11] Founded in 1868 by B. L. Rice, CIE, Director of Public Instruction, Mysore, with a group of philanthropists, it was later named after L. B. Bowring, the then Chief Commissioner of Mysore and Coorg, and a president of the club. The club, which still exists, cherishes traditions from the past: the annual May Queen Ball is part of its Anglo Indian heritage, conjuring wistful images of young girls in pastel dresses holding their dance cards.

Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Borodin, Rachmaninoff, Shostakovich … I have it all shipped by lorry to Jimmy's estate; we have set a date for the wedding. The date is the only one Jimmy seems to be able to agree on from among a list of auspicious dates suggested by KV. The sage, educated and erudite KV, an orthodox Brahmin, has strong beliefs in the auspiciousness or otherwise of dates for various events according to the Hindu astrological calendar. It is not the date that would be best for both of us, but is one, KV says, that will be good for Jimmy. "Oh well," says KV resignedly, "If you must, then let it be good for at least one of you." I don't give the matter much further thought. I pack my mother's little silver-blue Herald with my personal luggage and last minute odds and ends, hire a driver and set off for the Anamalais. While passing through a village close to the foothills, the car hits a dog; I turn around and through the rear window see it spinning in circles, upright on all four legs, yelping in pain and distress; I think it's seriously injured but I am not sure; the driver doesn't stop, or react. The street is full of people but nobody does anything. I feel an uneasy knot in the hollow of my belly, which begins to grow and does not leave me, though I try to squelch it down and out of my consciousness.

December 28 – A Soviet cruise missile plunges into Inarinjärvi Lake in Finnish Lapland. Finnish authorities make public the fact on January 3, 1985.

December 31 – Indira Gandhi's son Rajiv takes office as prime minister of India.

January 3, 1985 – My wedding day: I become a Planter's Wife.

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I Braked the Brake and the Brake Broke: Tales from the Plantations and Beyond

We are married at the Savoy Hotel in Ooty on the morning of January 3, 1985. The ceremony is performed by the local Registrar of Marriages who happens to be a retired South Indian, Anglican priest. When he starts to say "Jimmy, will you…." My imminent husband visibly snaps to attention and says "Here!" and a wave of mirth ripples through the room. We were all, having been educated in old boarding schools in India where customs had been established long ago by the British, accustomed to roll calls at school assemblies where we were obliged to announce our presence by calling out "Here!" in response.

When the ceremony is over, we adjourn to the Savoy's Canterbury Bar, just a few steps away, for pre-luncheon toasts and camaraderie. One guest who later becomes a mutual friend voices the observation with tongue in cheek that "Jimmy got married at the bar," which not long after seems rather fitting.

The Savoy Hotel reaches back into my childhood, when it was managed by the Grants – Alan and Bea. I'd been kidnapped by my father on November 10th, 1958 – the year that Diwali, Indian festival of lights, coincided with my eighth birthday. Daddy had come to visit, and my mother, feeling as she later described "rather sorry for him" had let me stay with him overnight

at the hotel where he was staying – the Savoy. Missing my mother at bedtime, after the fireworks had been exhausted, I asked to be taken Home to Mummy. He bundled me into his car – at that time a black Fiat – and we set off in the dark of the night. Sleepy, I lay down in the back seat, only to sit up at a curve in the road – just in time to see Cliff School, and with it "Home and Mummy" go by. Frantic and angry, I protested at his treachery, but he shushed me and kept on driving.

We arrived at the West End hotel in Bangalore, after driving through the night, to find Yvonne and Vanessa waiting for us, with new clothes and yet another doll for me. I remember realizing then that he'd planned it all. We all then set off on the four-day long drive to Bombay, with Mummy arriving well before us, having taken a plane. So began another of the interminable court cases when Mummy tried to get me back from Daddy. And thus the Grants were brought into our lives.

But first things first, the excitement of the trip by car from Bangalore to Bombay soon banished my chagrin at having been kidnapped. It was a trip we took for several years over the Christmas holidays, when under court order, I went to stay with Daddy. It took us a minimum of four days by car, from Bangalore to Bombay via Poona (now Pune) where we'd stay at the Turf Club and Lonavla (for fresh strawberries and cream from buffalo milk, from which we once got rather sick – too many strawberries washed in questionable water) stopping overnight at fancy hotels in big cities (the West End in Bangalore with its sprawling grounds, the Brindavan Gardens in Mysore with its fountains and concrete zoo animals) and lonely dakh bungalows out in the moffusil, which if it was dark when we arrived were always haunted – according to Daddy. On occasion when weary and too far from habitation, we'd camp out in the car – he'd pick a likely spot with a wild backdrop, declare "panther country!" and there'd we'd spend the

night. Daddy was adept at entertaining small children on the road, fright was one method. Water and food were others. Out in the countryside between Bombay and Poona we'd pass gypsy caravans and he'd tell us he'd hand us over to the gypsies if we didn't behave ourselves. We stopped at every fast moving rocky stream in the jungles, and at every paddy field irrigation canal and pond along the way in the plains, so that Vanessa and I could cool off, with not a thought wasted on safety as we slithered around amongst the rocks or swam in the often cattle-stirred ponds. Tired out and happy, hungry and thirsty, we would drive on till we found the next roadside watermelon or tender coconut stand where we'd stop again, inspect the melons and look into the little square window the melon man had cut in the rind of one (to see how red and juicy it was inside), until we found one to our liking. The tender coconuts had to be just right – not too tender so that there was only water and no coconut inside, and not too mature so that the coconut inside was too thick and had to be cut with a knife. The coconut wallah would whack off the outer skin of the just-right-coconut tops (one for each of us) and chop through the top of the shell leaving the top hanging by a thread of husk. After each of us had drained the coconut water from our individual coconuts, drinking straight from the shell, we'd hand our coconut to the man and he'd whack it in half, slice off a portion of the green husk, and hand both back – the slice would serve as a spoon to scoop out the slippery, tender white coconut meat from the inside.

Eventually back in Ooty with Mummy, the Grants of the Savoy Hotel became a long-lasting part of our lives, well into my teenage years.

Alan Grant had been an officer in the British army in India, a Major I think, or a Colonel. They had lived in Nainital in the Kumaon region of the Himalayas, birthplace of Jim Corbett, intrepid hunter of man-eating tigers and leopards, and author of all those books my Grandpa

introduced me to, feeding my love of the jungles and my reading habit from an early age. I can still see the dusty bookshelf in the doorway between the long, narrow sitting room and our (my mother's and my) bedroom, in Grandpa and Granny's house in Whitefield (ten miles from Bangalore); the bookshelf that held all Corbett's books, the most well known of which, "Man-Eaters of Kumaon," first published in 1944 by the Oxford University Press, was my favorite.

When Alan Grant retired, he and Bea moved to South India, where they took up second careers managing the Savoy Hotel in Ooty, a hill-station in the Nilgiris in South India. Both Nainital and Ooty were Hill Stations created by the British as respite for soldiers and colonial officers and their families from the fierce summers of the Indian plains. Both towns possess a central lake in a valley surrounded by mountains – Nainital's mountains being the more impressive and with the added benefit of snow, it being after all situated in the foothills of the Himalayas. Ooty, in the Nilgiri Hills, though at 7,500 feet above mean sea level was too far south for snow, nevertheless the air was crisp and cool all year round, and the only heat one felt was when one stood directly in the sun on a summer day, then one burned quickly – we used to say it was because we were closer to the sun. In the winter frost covered the ground overnight and we as children – myself and the children in Cliff School where my mother worked as Head Mistress (the little preparatory boarding school's first head mistress) – would wake up early mornings to marvel at the frosty lawns and to retrieve the shallow bowls of fresh-squeezed orange juice we'd set outside at night to find with never-failing delight that they'd frozen solid into a tasty treat. A treat most special as ice cream in any form was hard to come by in those years, Shinkows Chinese Restaurant – down the road from Higginbotham's Booksellers (where my mother picked up her copies of British magazines, Women's Weekly and Woman and Home) and St. Stephens Church (consecrated on November 5, 1830 by John Matthias Turner, Bishop of

Calcutta, its massive wooden beams having been hauled up the hills by elephant from Tippu Sultan's palace) – was the only place in town that served ice cream, much loved by me because of the crunchy bits of ice that it – imperfectly frozen – contained. I grew up apace with Shinkows' son Pong Kiew; the last time I saw him when with my mother, he was a tall handsome young man with a round smiling face and had just taken over the restaurant.

Ooty, that once-lovely little town with the lake surrounded by arum lilies and towering, ancient eucalyptus trees, weeping willows and fir trees, and further afield, the rolling Wenlock Downs painted with swathes of yellow-blooming gorse and broom, which had been imported by Scotsmen because it looked so very much like Scotland. In the spring, the mimosa trees would add the heady perfume of their soft yellow puff-ball flower clusters to the mix.

Alan Grant ran the hotel and managed the accounts while Bea ran the kitchen, dining room, gardens and hotel staff. They were a sublimely happy couple, content with their place in the scheme of things. The Savoy had been a hotel since 1841. Built with fireplaces in every room, the hotel retained its British character, held firmly in place by the Grants, and to which it clung, proudly and tenaciously long after their time there ended.

At our wedding, on January 3, 1985, years after Alan died and Bea had been relegated to the hotel's Annex down the road, with room and board provided by the hotel's owners, Spencer & Company – because they were kind, and she had nowhere to go though she would have been quite capable of running the entire institution on her own (she died of a broken heart soon after) – I meet one of the old butlers in the dining room. The old man remembers my name and who I had been as a child, when my mother took me on our frequent Sunday visits to the Grants, where we had tea, and often dinner, and afterwards sat by the fire and listened to Alan tell stories of his

time in Nainital, with his Great Danes, and the time the dogs narrowly escaped being eaten by a tiger that had chased them up onto the verandah where Alan sat in his chair one evening. Alan and Bea were both tall, he slightly hunched with age. They were both always impeccably dressed, Alan in a suit; Bea, a big woman, in her straight skirts, twin-piece, high heels, and stockings which she hung to dry on a hanger in their terracotta-tiled bathroom. She wore her steel grey hair short with a wispy fringe in front. The Grants then became an extra arm of my mother's and my family; I called them "Uncle Alan and Aunty Bea".

In addition to the Grants, we had another couple tacked onto our family, "Uncle Bill and "Aunty Muriel" Withal, who together ran the Ooty Gymkhana Club. Bill was officially the Secretary of the club; Muriel looked after the clubhouse – the guestrooms, the kitchen, the staff… On alternate Sundays, when we weren't visiting the Grants at the Savoy Hotel, we spent our time with Bill and Muriel, enjoying Muriel's wonderful cooking (I can still taste her jam filled jelly roll, still warm from the oven, and the smell of fresh rosemary takes me instantly back to her baked marrow, stuffed with minced beef lavishly seasoned with rosemary leaves from the potted shrub on their sun-warmed concrete patio). Bill and Muriel had no children; they had instead, five Sidney Silkies whose long fine fur Muriel kept meticulously groomed, referring to them as "our children." Uncle Bill had a bit of a paunch and a not-quite-upper-class English accent and was best described as a jovial sort of chap. Aunty Muriel was a tall, very slim Anglo-Indian. She wore her curling salt-and-pepper hair in a bun, smoked cigarettes elegantly, dressed well in a straight skirt and twin-piece and wore high heels with no regard to the bunions on her feet. The Ooty Gymkhana club was (and still is) on the outskirts of Ooty, out among the rolling hills of the Wenlock Downs, named after Sir Arthur Lawley's brother Beilby Lawley, 3rd Baron Wenlock. Also on the Downs, at some distance from the Gymkhana club, was the Ooty Hunt

Club, with riding stables and kennels and from where the Ooty Hounds hunted jackals across the surrounding countryside and the open grasslands of the Downs. There were Point to Point Races and Gymkhanas, hence the name of the club. When Bill and Muriel ran it, the Ooty Gymkhana club served chiefly as a golf club, with an eighteen-hole course, though the Gymkhana races and Point to Points were still held once a year, with a ragged assortment of Ooty ponies and their urchin riders serving as the grand finale. Once a week, on Saturday mornings, I'd go riding on the downs, initially as a student in Miss Phyllis Scott's Riding School, and later on my own, with no boundaries, the open rolling grasslands stretching out ahead of me as far as the eye could see.

Ooty, place of my childhood and growing-up years, is situated deep within the Nilgiri hills. The Nilgiris were ruled by kings of the Ganga dynasty and later by the Hoysalas, in particular Maharaja Vishnuvardhana who captured the Wynad and Nilgiri districts during the 11th century.

The area was originally a tribal land occupied by the Todas along with other hill tribes, among them the Irulas, the Badagas, the Kotas, and the Kurumbas, all of whom coexisted peacefully. Of the five tribes, growing up I was familiar only with the Todas and the Badagas.

The first reference to the Todas in the Nilgiris is to be found in a record dated 1117 A.D. (Francis, W. 1908). The Todas are a polyandrous tribe, a peaceful pastoral people who raise fierce brown water buffaloes. When we spoke of them amongst us as children, we passed along common lore that those fierce buffaloes tolerated the Todas and only the Todas because they smelled like them – the Todas used ghee clarified from buffalo-milk butter to oil the ringlets in their hair, after they'd washed their hair in buffalo urine. If you were not a Toda, you risked being gored by a ferocious, charging buffalo if you went near the herd. The Todas were fraternally polyandrous – one woman would marry all the brothers in a family. As teenage girls

we shared with delighted snickers the lore that when one husband was being entertained by the wife, he would leave his herdsman's staff upright outside the door as a sign to the other brother-husbands. The Todas built very distinctive dwellings, oval, barrel-vaulted with rounded thatched roofs, and a door so low one had to get down on all fours and crawl through to enter.

Everything about the Todas was different from everything else in India. Their origin remains shrouded in mystery, though it has long been speculated that they are descendants of one of the Lost Tribes of Israel, based on their appearance, clothing and customs. The men are tall, with curly hair and bushy beards and this, along with their hand-spun cloaks and their herdsmen's staffs, made them look decidedly biblical. The women wear their hair in heavy ringlets (greased with buffalo ghee), but their features as a whole are not as impressive as their men. I can attest to the surprising discovery that the silver Toda jewelry I'd acquired as a young woman, was startlingly similar to silver jewelry a friend acquired when she was in Lebanon.

The other Nilgiri tribe I was familiar with, the Badagas, are an agricultural people (they grow an amazing variety of colorful beans that you can still buy in the Ooty market). Frederick Price in his book "Ootacamund, a History," states that the area called 'Old Ooty' was originally occupied by the Todas. The Todas then handed over that part of the town to John Sullivan, then Governor of Coimbatore. Sullivan later developed the town of Ooty (originally called Wotaycamund) and promoted the establishment of tea, cinchona (for quinine), and teak plantations.

Further back in history, the Nilgiri territory came into the East India Company's possession as part of lands ceded to the Crown by Tippu Sultan, after he was defeated by the British at the battle of Srirangapatnam by the treaty of the same name in 1799. The ruins of Tippu's fort still lie on the road between Ooty and Bangalore – one of the markers I watched for,

setting my imagination off running, and by which I would gauge the distance left to Granny and Grandpa's house on every long eight hour journey my mother and I and Mercy Ayah would undertake by bus to spend the long winter holidays with her parents. Srirangapatnam was about three hours away from Bangalore when I was a child and the road was narrower. Distance was measured in time – by the length of time it took the bus to drive from one point to another, through bustling towns, sleepy villages, slow moving herds of buffalo crossing the road, (we called them brake inspectors), stray dogs, donkeys, scampering children and monkeys and the general languid chaos that was India. By the time we got to Srirangapatnam we were well on our way to Bangalore, past the jungles of Mudumalai (Madras State) and Bandipur (Mysore State) game reserves, where my attention heightened as I searched the jungles going by the bus windows for wildlife, sometimes seeing wild elephant, often herds of chital (commonly referred to as spotted deer), packs of grey Langur monkeys, the occasional wild boar, and always hoping for a leopard or a tiger, but never seeing one.

Among other landmarks I looked forward to on that bus journey was the stop at a grimy little village where Mercy Ayah who travelled with us would get out of the bus and make her way into the restaurant to get us a steaming packet of upma wrapped first in a banana leaf and then newspaper, green tinged and scented by the freshly ground coriander leaves that were mandatory among its list of ingredients – toasted semolina, sliced onions, cashew nuts, uradh dhal, black mustard seed, fresh green chilies and ginger root – all fried in ghee and steamed to perfection with the addition of boiling water to create this indescribably delicious south Indian breakfast dish.

Another of my favorite landmarks was the bus stop at Channapatna, where my mother and I always made our pilgrimage to the toy stands where I would acquire another two or three

brightly lacquered carved wooden toys to add to my collection. (The origin of those toys can be traced to the reign of Tippu Sultan – Tippu invited artisans from Persia to train local craftsmen in the making of wooden toys). Channapatna is known as Gombegala Ooru (doll town, or toy-town) of Karnataka (Mysore State as it was called when I was a child).

The names of the villages and towns on that bus route roll through my mind: Naduvattam, Gudalur, Nanjangud, Masinagudi, Bandipur, Gundalpet, Begur, Kurahatti, Uppinahali, Nanjangud, Mysore (big city), Srirangapatna (Tippu's fort), Mandya, Channapatna (of the lacquered wooden toys), Hosepet, Closepet (later known as Ramanagaram – well known to me as Closepet from the cattle-marauding-leopard hunting stories of my parents)… The countryside around Ramanagaram (also known as Ramanagara) is strewn with massive granite rock-formations and boulders – and caves for the leopards.

When a small child, I'd start to bounce in my seat as the bus pulled into the outskirts of Bangalore at dusk, always excited at the prospect of seeing Grandpa and Granny, who'd be waiting for us at the City Bus Station. Out of the bus we'd climb, luggage would be unloaded from the bus and into the waiting car by one of the clamoring coolies: suitcase, bedroll, and basket of fresh Ooty "English Vegetables" – cauliflower, cabbages, potatoes, peas, turnips, carrots with gunny sack stitched over the top. All settled into the car, we'd set off on the last leg of our journey, the ten mile drive to Whitefield, and my grandparent's house that they'd bought when Grandpa retired from the Salt and Abkari (customs and excise) Department.

Grandpa named the house "Eureka," and there they lived for many years, the little house aging with them, its roof sagging with the weight of the cement Grandpa slapped onto its terracotta tiles broken by jumping monkeys, with the hope of stopping the leaks only to have it spring more leaks through which the monsoon rains relentlessly dripped with ever increasing

urgency. At the sound of the first drops of rain we'd dash about, the bucket brigade, with pots, pans, buckets, and occasionally a commode, to set out to catch the leaks. Outside the house was paradise, with its one acre grounds filled with mango trees, custard apples, rose apples, pomegranates, limes, guavas, sapotas, casuarinas – whose whooshing whispers filled the air when the wind blew – and resident animal, bird, reptile and insect life, including those marauding rhesus monkeys – for whom we left one mango tree's fruit for their taking – the little palm squirrels with three stripes down their backs (legend says that the Hindu Lord Rama stroked a squirrel in thanks for her contributions towards building the bridge to rescue his consort Sita, leaving the impression of three of his fingers down her back that every squirrel still bears to this day), mynah birds, little screech owls, green barbettes, tiny lal munyahs, cobras, Russell's vipers, Kraits, rat snakes, bumble bees, ants, ant lions and the Fairies in the Garden. The fairies lived, so Grandpa told me, in silk lined burrows in the ground, as he walked around the grounds with me, pointing out the dwellings. The girl fairies had little rounded bowler-hat shaped doors to their dens; the boy-fairies had top-hat shaped doors. Encouraged by Grandpa, I'd set out oval herring tins filled with water close to a fairy abode, with half walnut shells for boats and flat toothpicks for oars. Fairies liked to go boating, I proposed. Then one day, on a visit to a fairy abode, I started to lift up the door on one of the burrows, but it would not budge – it felt like something was pulling it from below. Eventually yielding to my prying fingers, the door opened up and I saw a large black scary beast scurry down the burrow. I ran screaming to Grandpa, telling him something large black and hairy had gotten into a fairy house and possibly gotten the fairies too. And thus was I introduced to the Trapdoor Spider (the mygalomorph trapdoor spider of the family Ctenizidae (Araneae, Idiopidae)). Alas, no more Fairies in the Garden, no more herring tin lakes and walnut shell boats with toothpick oars. Never one to be deterred from the

enjoyment of solitary pursuits for long, from that moment on I would spend my time catching large black ants, dropping them as offerings into the burrows of Trapdoor Spiders. I also dropped the ants into the sandy funnel pits of ant lions – another one of the creatures Grandpa introduced me to. The ants, when not being fed to trap door spiders and ant lions, I would lay out sugar crystals and grain for.

Whitefield, place of warmth, solace and solitary pursuits, remembered and revered even from the great distance and time that took me away from it. Grandpa died in February of 1983. Granny lived on in the crumbling house, visiting Mummy in Ooty on and off until she cried out to "go home" again each time. Mummy died in Ooty in September of 1984, leaving Granny bewildered and utterly lost. Back to Whitefield poor addled Granny insisted on returning not long after, declaring she did not want to attend my wedding. I shrugged inwardly, assuming she'd simply forgotten who I was.

After our wedding lunch, we drive down the Sighur Ghat road to the village of Masinagudi at the border of the Mudumalai Game Sanctuary. We have been invited to the wedding reception for the daughter of an old friend of my husband.

The guest house is filled with strangers, and I know almost nobody there. My new husband, I discover almost as soon as we walk into the reception, is not quite the man I thought I'd married. His demeanor towards me has turned inexplicably brusque and rude. His first introduction of his new wife to a couple he knows is so startlingly rude I find myself incapable of any response other than automatic politeness – I have to behave myself, I cannot make a scene,

we are in polite company. Other than a raised eyebrow from the wife, the couple does not acknowledge the odd introduction.

The rest of the day passes in a blur. Apparently there are at least two other people who have noticed my husband's behavior and what must be a mystified and woeful expression under the surface of the smile on my face. One, the young woman whose wedding reception we were attending takes me aside and says "Don't let Jimmy bully you." Good advice, apparently said in jest, but how am I to follow it? I have not a clue. Another, a fellow planter and close friend of Jimmy's, says "Jimmy has his ways; don't let them get to you."

And so begins our marriage. I've been badly stung and the venom stays in my veins and will tinge the rest of our life together. Determined to make the best of things, to be a good wife, I let matters rest, I show no offence taken, I display no reaction. I have been raised to be a good girl, to always please. I make it through the day and we set off on the long drive to the Anamalai Tea Plantations – Mudis Group, Bombay Burmah Trading Co. Ltd., where my husband is Estate Manager, or Dorai in Tamil (big master) of Mukkotumudi Estate. All the estates in the Mudis group are named after elephants; each Manager's bungalow on the top of a hill, a Mudi. The word Anamalai is Tamil for Elephant Hills. The ancient migratory routes of elephants still run through the estates, and the elephant herds walk through the tea fields.

I settle in at the big bungalow on the hill, and begin my life as a good Planter's Wife. I am a good cook; I have servants, including a butler-cum-cook who I teach to be a better cook, a houseboy and a gardener. I plant seeds in the garden that grow into enormous dinner-plate Dahlias. My first visit to the kitchen in the bungalow reveals things both horrendous and yet hilarious: the electric hot water geyser in the butler's pantry drips ferociously and constantly, an electrocution waiting to take place. I have the geyser replaced. The cook keeps the week's

supply of beef in a large aluminum tray in the frost-choked freezer, which he brings out once a day to thaw just enough to cut off enough for the day's cooking. The tray of bloody beef then goes back into the freezer, to refreeze until the following day. I introduce the practice of cutting up the weekly side of beef and wrapping up daily portions in plastic bags.

I throw my first dinner party as a good Planter's Wife: the dinner-plate dahlias fill vases all over the house, the bungalow spotless, the furniture and floors are polished, the butler and houseboy are dressed in their best white uniforms, and I am bathed, dressed and ready at the door to greet the guests as they arrive. We entertain thirty-six guests, all estate managers, assistant managers, and their wives from the other estates in the area. My Chinese Crab Noodles are a big success; the Group Manager's wife asks for the recipe. I do not entirely remember what I put in them. Noodles, crab from a frozen slab brought up from the coast, celery, spring onions, Aji no Moto – if you put celery, spring onions and Aji no Moto into noodles or fried rice and whatever meat/fish/chicken you choose, it will taste Chinese. Aji no Moto is Monosodium Glutamate. Used sparingly, it hurts nobody, and makes Chinese food Chinese. The dining room walls are adorned with Jimmy's framed "duckses" as he fondly called them – calendar prints of pairs of ducks, from mallards, to teals, pintails to mandarins, and my favorites, the red-breasted mergansers with their mad-hairdos and wild-eyes. I later retired the duck prints and replaced them with 'art.' Perhaps I should not have. In Chinese feng shui (I learned too many years later), Mandarin Ducks, because they mate for life, are symbols of ever-lasting togetherness and marital fidelity. The Chinese say images of Mandarin ducks help the single find a mate and bring good luck to those already in love. They solve marital problems, strengthen the marital union and promote marital bliss. In retrospect, I should have kept those ducks, all of them, packing them

up for our every move from one estate to another; I should have hung them in every dining room on every estate we were transferred to.

I soon meet and get to know all the planters; one dinner invitation is returned with another dinner invitation to another plantation in a never-ending social whirl. There are also cricket matches on the grounds of the Anmalai Planters' Club, gatherings around the bar in the club, where duly chastised by Jimmy, I learn my place is not standing at the bar, but sitting with the ladies. It is at the club I discover that some ladies sneak a cigarette in the ladies' room lounge (I'd never have known they smoked). I, a smoker at the time, smoke in public; I suppose I'm forgiven since I'm some uncouth foreign woman. I have so much to learn. There are tennis, squash and badminton games at the Mudis club every evening; Jimmy must have his exercise, he's as addicted to a good sweat as he is to his rum and cigarettes. He also plays very well. I fall further from grace when, having declared I can play badminton, I immediately display I have no understanding of the concept of competition – for me, a badminton game is simply the act of lobbing a shuttlecock across the net at the other party and having it lobbed right back at you. This is what I did as a child. That there is competition involved, that you're supposed to defeat your opponent, I am completely ignorant of. Jimmy expresses his derision, but shows no inclination of wanting to teach me. While he's not watching, I discover with the help of another young planter that I can indeed, play a decent game if given the chance.

The next ten years of my marriage continue in the vein set the day after our wedding, a roller coaster ride, with every new day bringing with it no acknowledgement of the verbal assault that took place the day before, invariably at the dinner table, after a requisite number of rums: one glass seems to relax Jimmy, two loosen him up, three glasses make him garrulous, the fourth

glass flips a switch, and the ride begins when we sit down to dinner. Out pours a vituperative stream of abuse over a long list of imagined slights and insults that I am accused of being the author or protagonist of. Since these outbursts take place most often at the dinner table, I start referring to them to myself as Food Fights. Every morning after brings no apology, no further questions, no further accusations, no further reference to the exchange that took place at the dinner table the night before. The slate has been wiped clean, and I am left, as always, hurt, puzzled, mystified, angry, and too afraid to ask questions. I have already learned that a request for an explanation results in a wildly illogical bypass down unrelated meandering pathways that leave my cry for logic and rationality lost and echoing in a vast abyss in which I find myself clawing with futility for the light at the rim, always out of reach. It is not always in private and at the dinner table when these invectives take place though. On a few occasions the attacks take place among close friends. Oddly, no one ever says anything; faces with stunned expressions but no voices.

And yet, in the midst of this strained marriage, there is the brighter side, the beauty of the plantations, the landscapes, the serene way of life, the personalities of the other planters and their families, the camaraderie and the close-knit sense of community. Those interminable dinners that often seem like such a futile chore, serve to keep us all together – they get us cleaned up, dressed up, and off to visit the group on our best behavior. The stories and anecdotes told at those dinners, though sometimes repeated, always amuse. It is the best ones, after all, that are worth repeating most often:

The manager of one of the estates, upon having a slight mishap with his motorcycle during his rounds of the estate, submitted his accident report: "I braked the brake and the brake broke" it read, in its entirety.

The Group Manager proffers sage advice on some topic at hand to the assembled managers and assistant managers at a weekly meeting: “You can’t have your cake and eat it too.” To which one responded (the author of the famed motorcycle accident report), “Then why have a cake at all?”

There are other stories and anecdotes, some having to do with mad escapes from customs officials by young planters while driving back from expeditions down to the plains to pick up smuggled scotch from favored sources (the import of foreign liquor is prohibited, and scotch has to be scotch, and therefore smuggled) for the next big party. On at least one expedition, the scotch is confiscated.

Not a few stories involv harrowing encounters and escapes from wild elephants while driving down those long lonely narrow jungle roads so familiar to all planters: One young man came upon a rather large elephant – a tusker – standing in the middle of the road as he drove his car around a bend one night. He was fortunate enough to be able to stop the car in time, and had the presence of mind to throw it into reverse gear, whereupon he drove faster than he’d ever driven backwards for several miles until he was sure the elephant wasn’t chasing him.

Then there are the animal stories: the leopard that chased the manager’s dog up the steps to the kitchen door and tried to climb over the door (the door had a foot-wide gap at the top at the time), only to be met and shooed away with a dish cloth by the butler; the startled leopard obliged, leaving the dog to live longer. Alas there were other dogs at other times that were not so fortunate.

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Vignettes & Interludes

Two weeks after the wedding, Granny back in Whitefield falls and breaks her hip. She is hospitalized in Bangalore. When she is discharged we move her to the Mudis Garden hospital, where they decide she cannot stay; we then move her to a large hospital in Coimbatore, where I stay with her, and read a lot, including *The Female Eunuch* by Germaine Greer.

While at the hospital in Coimbatore with Granny, I receive a Deportation Notice from the government. The notice states that I have willfully disobeyed the laws of the country prohibiting foreigners to take up employment without a permit as I am working as a secretary in my mother's school.

Some official has misunderstood my earlier application for a re-entry visa to the country when my mother suffered a stroke, taking my stated 'occupation' on the form to mean the occupation I was engaged in while putting my mother's affairs in order after her death: "secretary" at her school. The fact that occupation stated refers to applicant's occupation in country of origin appears to have escaped the specially trained eye of the official. The Foreigners Registration Office in Ooty at that time came under the Superintendant of Police, Division of Crime. The Ooty office hasn't yet caught up with my application for a residential permit filed in Coimbatore.

Finally well enough to leave the hospital, Granny joins us on the estate. Mercy Ayah comes with us. Granny is bedridden, and spends her entire waking day calling out in misery, in Tamil, "Ai yai Yo! Ai yai Yo! Ai yai yo!" We think we will all go mad.

The deportation notice requires a trip to Madras City to see a lawyer with my mother's old friend KV. In Madras we discover that no hotel will let us stay unless we pay in U.S. dollars, because I am a Foreign National. However, I have no dollars; I left a bank account in California with a balance of $100.00. KV recommends a Brahmin hotel that lets us pay in Indian Rupees.

Madras is hot; there is no air conditioning, but the ceiling fan in the room spins furiously and the place is clean. The room boys wake us up at 5:30 in the morning to clean the room; in they come with bucket and mop. The restaurant is noisy but serves good vegetarian food on stainless steel thalis.

While waiting to see the lawyer, in KV's presence Jimmy grumbles about his plight. KV's response: "This is all happening to her Jimmy, not to you." The lawyer, hired to assist me, cross examines me as if I were a criminal, with an appropriate tone of voice. KV's level head keeps things from getting out of hand. Legal matters eventually sorted out, I now have a residence permit that must be renewed annually.

Back on the estate, the servants tell us that Granny ceased her chanting as soon as we'd left. We sneak around the bungalow for a day or two, but she must be able to either sense or to smell us – she starts chanting again. We have to walk down the hall past the guest room where she's ensconced to get to our own bedroom; there is no escape. The doctor declares Granny has dementia. We think we will all go mad.

June arrives and we leave Granny at the estate with the servants, and set out on a long train journey to meet Jimmy's mother Kumi and his brother's family in Jabalpur. It is monsoon time on the estates and in Jabalpur. This is the honeymoon we didn't have. Six weeks – nights spent in Jimmy's crumbling old house – train tracks to the side – grounds flooded to the doorsteps – villagers catching little brown crabs in the compound – days and evenings spent at Kumi's house around the corner – trips to the vegetable and fish market (river fish) in the evenings – buying damp fresh fragrant vegetables by the hiss of Petromax lamplight. Spending time with Kumi in her kitchen watching her cook, learning Parsee cooking: eggs on fenugreek

greens, eggs on potatoes, eggs with tomatoes, goat with potatoes, goat with ladies fingers, prawns with tomatoes, meat soup with rice. It is all very, very good. We enjoy each other's company. Kumi says: "You know Wendy, there's something I'd like to tell you – Jimmy has a very bad temper"

The promised honeymoon trip to Marble Rocks and Khajurao that never was, instead, endless evenings sitting around the television in Kumi's house listening to the family converse in Guajarati, and the television in Hindi.

Not long after we're back at the plantations, we are transferred to Manjolai estate in the Singampatti group, far, far away – Jimmy grumbling "they've transferred me down there because of you!" Packing up the household – big teak boxes – load the lorries – Judy the Labrador travels with the servants (cook/butler Kathiraisan, houseboy Paulraj and their wives) – Granny and Mercy Ayah in the car with us. Very long road trip. Arrive in Manjolai – magical land of jungles and towering wild mango trees, and orchids, and enormous delicious wild mushrooms, and of course tea fields. I send for Ratna to help with Granny; Mercy Ayah is growing too old to manage. There are just three estates in this group, Manjolai, Mannimuthar and Oothu, and no other company's plantations anywhere near us. Down the ghat (there's always a ghat) is the Madura Coates club, where we go for entertainment, New Year's parties, and the swimming pool.

We have chickens; they range all over, and go to roost at night in what was once a planter's child's play house. I set a clutch of duck eggs under a broody hen, they hatch. They're not Mandarins, but ducks nevertheless; they live life with utter abandon and gusto. I am

enchanted. Peace descends upon us. Granny's in a wheelchair and still hard to please but has stopped her manic chanting, and Ratna's devotion soothes her.

August 1987, I discover I'm pregnant. It's taken three years, and I'm convinced it's the ducks that did it – more precisely, the peace and contentment that watching them brought me. Everyone is delighted at the news – Jimmy, the servants, the other planters, though I'm not so sure about Granny. One day as she sits on the edge of her bed, she declares in one of her frequent outbursts, "Your baby will die before it's born!" I fly into a rage, pick up her bedside rug and beat her with it. The rug is a small one and she is not hurt, but Ratna, horrified, tries to stop me: "Miss, Miss, don't beat her, stop please!" Granny, never my favorite relative, the constant grumbler remembered from my childhood whom I nevertheless loved, if with reservations because she had a strangely mean streak, has become my karma, the millstone around my neck, the reason I had to stay with Jimmy when I would have left him, but also the reason my child came into the world (Granny's predictions notwithstanding).

Pregnancy suits me – there is no morning sickness, just bliss. During those months I succumb to the urge to cook pickles, filling enormous glass jars with pickles – not dill pickles, but Indian pickles, lime pickles, mango pickles, chili pickles, gooseberry pickles. And many of the recipes come from my mother's 1965 edition of the TNT (*Time 'n Talents*) cookbook – whose authors are overwhelmingly Parsee ladies[12], one of whom is the mother of Jimmy's old friend Dinshah, who on my wedding day said "Jimmy has his ways; don't let them get to you." Dinshah has long since become my friend too.

[12] *The Time and Talents Club*, Bombay (now Mumbai) was founded in 1934 by the wives of affluent Parsi gentlemen in the city. The ladies' first cookbook was published (a single sheet) in 1935.

The story of two births, mine in relative comfort. I sojourn at the Madura Cotes club in Tuticorin two weeks before the due date – waiting for baby – checking myself into the Sacred Heart Hospital – wandering around the hospital's farm, watching the pigs. Finally a caesarian birth by necessity at 07:21 p.m. on April 8 1988 – oh she looks just like her father…then blackout. I never got to hold her, they handed her to Jimmy: awake and conscious through the procedure (I'd insisted on an epidural), but agitated after the operation, I'd insisted I had to sit up. There was nothing I wanted more in the world then than to sit up on the operating table. Unable to convince me to lie still or to hold me down, the doctor injected me with a sedative and knocked me out cold. I didn't get to touch the baby until the next morning, when I woke up to find her in her crib by my bedside in the hospital room. The nurse, who'd kept watch over us then recounted how they'd kept her in a separate room but finding her blue from the cold air-conditioning when they checked on her in the middle of the night, moved her into my room.

The other birth, Kathiraisan the cook's wife Malar (her name means Garland of Flowers) laughingly tells me of the journey by bullock cart on the bumpy dirt track from her village to the hospital during which she was sure the baby would be born right there in the cart. She had a son, Kate's first friend and playmate.

Peaceful interlude (for the most part) at Manjolai – several visits to friends on a salt farm at Tuticorin, (place of my daughter's birth), straight across the tip of India on the east coast, where one night I start to go outside to join the group sitting in their chairs only to have Jimmy say "go back inside I don't want you out here." One of the friends, a man, laughs and says "Jimmy is a misogynist, don't pay attention to him." I lost my nerve, turned around and went back in.

Airing Granny on the beach, with Jimmy's visiting mother Kumi, who is now known as Kumi Granny. The duck house is raided one night and most of them are killed – we heard the ruckus in the middle of the night as something chased them around by the bedroom window. The jungles were all around us; it could have been a leopard. All we find the next day are a few scattered feathers, and the survivors huddled in the duck pen.

Kate's 1st birthday in 1989 – Granny's death 4 days later on April 13th. All on the estate come to pay their respects to "Periamma" (Grandmother as she was known to all) in a plain wooden coffin in the bungalow hallway. Burial at the plantation cemetery up the hill, her headstone inscribed:

Sacred to the memory of "Granny"
Kathleen Gladys Roze, nee Muller,
Born September 30, 1889, died April 13, 1989
So Far Away From Home
R.I.P.

1990 – Transfer back to Mudis – everything goes with us but the few remaining ducks. Briefly at Gajammudi estate, then at Anaimudi estate – the plantation where the manager shot himself in the main bedroom, sitting in his planter's arm chair, while his wife was away visiting her parents. Settling in at Anaimudi bungalow, wondering if there'd be a ghost; there isn't – Kate's first school, pre-kindergarten, several-mile-ride by van.

1991 – I undertake a trip to the U.S.A, Kate in tow, in a failed attempt to secure immigration papers for Jimmy and his two children. I discover I'm pregnant two weeks after I arrive, then have a miscarriage, and return to India, defeated. Jimmy never forgives me for

wasting all his money. Shortly after I return I receive word that Yvonne has died – surreal interlude – another long story, a time I'd rather not remember, perhaps some other time…

1992 – Transfer to Dunsandle Tea Estate (first planted in 1859 by Major Rae) in Ooty … home turf – another peaceful interlude – Kate goes to Cliff School – I commandeer the car to drive her to Ooty and back every day – enroll myself in 'computer college' in town. Mistress of my own time, I join the Nilgiri Library; Jimmy gets angry – I've learned he does not like me to have a life of my own, a life in which he has no part. Conversation at dinner one night at a friend's house in Ooty: I voice an opinion on some subject under discussion. Jimmy, irate: "Nobody wants to hear your opinion." A sympathetic if quizzical look from the host, but nobody says anything.

1993 – Transfer to Siddapur coffee estate in Coorg – Jimmy goes; I stay in Dunsandle with Kate until end of term at school.

1993 – UPASI (United Planters Association of South India) centenary celebrations. Attend events with Jimmy at Wellington, Nilgiris. All is well with the world, until I leave Dunsandle and join Jimmy in Coorg. Jimmy's mood in Coorg worsens. Perhaps it's the gloomy monsoons when the lights in the bungalow are so dim, perhaps it's Jimmy's old ghosts haunting him – this is the same plantation, the same house, where he was stationed when he was married to his first wife, when their children were small.

On the few occasions when we still make love, Jimmy presses his face so close to mine when he kisses me that I suffocate and have to break away, gasping for breath.

I find I'm beginning to dislike myself: I become irritable in company and am unable to contain my petulance over Jimmy's public life-of-the-party persona. My irritability and petulance are directed at Jimmy and I know my churlishness reflects most badly upon myself, but I feel safest displaying my ire in public and cannot stop myself.

1994 – An elephant dies on the estate.

July 18, 1994 – At dinner, the monsoon well set in, the lights at their dimmest, Food Fight – Jimmy: "I will destroy you before I let you go." "You, with your Anglo Indian ways, your American brutality, your Nazi mentality…" What did I do? Distraught over the attack, nevertheless I had to marvel at his choice of phrases summing up my heritage: Anglo Indian – my mother's family, and the term Anglo Indian used in a derogatory sense; American – my father – but only the first generation born in the U.S. of Russian immigrants, or more specifically, Ukrainian; Nazi – my great-great maternal grandfather was German, a merchant mariner, shipwrecked off the coast of Tranquebar in South East India (long before the Nazis, though that's of no significance to Jimmy). I remember thinking that he'd thought this one out carefully and rehearsed it well to bring it out and brandish it at the first opportunity he could snatch, with or without a relevant context.

But, he forgot the Russians – what would he have made of them – Bolshevist or Czarist? He wouldn't have known it would be neither – my father's parents were Ukrainian peasants, refugees from the grinding poverty that Joseph Roth describes in his Radetzky March. My paternal grandmother was born in Podhieji, Galicia, on the border between Poland and Ukraine, in what was then the poorest corner of the Hapsburg Empire, three years after Roth, in 1897.

Unlike Roth, Grandmother Paraskeva was uneducated. She may have been Jewish, she spoke Yiddish. She would one day tell her daughter-in-law in Brooklyn a story of the time her aunt had tried to smother her with a feather pillow outside in the snow one bleak winter's day because there wasn't enough food to feed the entire family. Grandfather Ivan was born in the village of Kozmin, about 200 miles east of Kyiv (Kiev) in what was called the Vohlynskaya gubernia (region) of Tsarist Russia. Ivan and Paraskeva, originating from neighboring regions, emigrated separately, met and married in Brooklyn, NY, becoming John and Pauline Momot. Their sons Wasyl (William), Olexandre (Alexander) and Hryhorij (Henry), all born in Brooklyn, would raise their children with stories that their father's ancestors were originally from France and that one, as a soldier in Napoleon's army, deserted during the long harsh Russian winter along with many of Napoleons soldiers, settled in Russia and became a Cossack.

As I get up from the dining table to leave, Jimmy hurls a trivet at me; it misses as I turn around in the doorway to face him, just in time, and whizzes right by my head. This is his first display of physical violence.

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Death of an Elephant

The blossom showers do their usual annual magic between March and April of 1994. Eight days after the first rain drops fall on the tightly rolled buds, dissolving their abscisic acid coating and setting the blossom sequence into motion, a carpet of white flowers covers each branch of the old gnarled Robusta bushes like snow. The air fills with the heady scent of coffee in full bloom. It smells nothing like coffee. Some say the scent is exquisite, alluring, akin to jasmine, but stronger, the perfume of dreamland. Others find the scent overpowering, narcotic, disorienting, mind-altering, maddening, even, a perfume for the Lotus Eaters.

I am on a coffee plantation, in Coorg not very far from the western edge of the Deccan plateau in southwest India. My husband is a Planter; he manages this coffee estate, having been transferred a year ago from a tea plantation in the Nilgiri Hills to this group of coffee estates. I am a Planter's Wife. I manage our home—the manager's bungalow, the gardens, the retinue of servants and our social obligations, hosting rounds of dinner parties, luncheons, tennis teas, picnics by the Cauvery River and the occasional visiting family from other, distant plantations. I am also a mother. We have a six-year old daughter, who attends the local convent school in Madikeri for a while, until I keep her at home. I decide that impromptu and hodgepodge lessons at home are preferable to attending a school that seats sixty children to a classroom, three to a desk, and where she gets beaten on the palm of her hand with a wooden ruler because she has

been unable to finish her homework. She has been unable to finish her homework because the lights flicker and fail as the first drops of monsoon rain hit the electricity transformer grids. When the lights do not flicker and fail, the voltage that does flow through the domestic lines is so low that the bulbs emit a light no brighter than candlelight. Unlike the other Planters' children, she has not yet been sent away to boarding school in the Nilgiris, though we have registered her at Lawrence School, Lovedale. Lawrence school was originally the Laidlaw Lawrence Memorial Institute during the time of the British, where my maternal great grandmother had been sent at the age of ten, as an orphan, when both her parents died of cholera. The monsoons do not come in earnest until mid June; we are not there yet, and these are memories and reminiscences of a year past.

On this morning, at the height of blossom season, with the air filled with the scent of coffee blossom, the cook brings my morning tea tray out to the verandah fully set: teapot, cup and saucer, spoon, tea strainer, sugar bowl, milk jug. There is milk in the jug, sugar in the bowl, and nothing but emptiness in the teapot. He looks bemused when I point this out, but we both know why he forgot the tea. He and I are similarly affected by the scent of coffee blossom. We lose threads of consciousness. Some planters' wives leave the district during blossom season; I have nowhere to go and so I stay, waking up each morning to another assault on my sense of smell and the connections between it and my brain. I endure, because there are other things that compensate. Blossom season is also bee season. The bees in Coorg are wild and they build hives that hang in massive pendulous slabs from the high branches of the tallest tress in the jungle canopy that serves as shade cover for the coffee bushes. The towering trees are a mix of, among others, giant rosewood, banyan and jackfruit. Walking out in the garden on a day filled with sunshine I am spattered with what feels like raindrops. There is not a cloud in the sky, but

the hum of swarming bees fills the air. The spatter is bee shit, falling out of a sky filled with bees. It smells like honey. I do not mind being covered in bee shit because it smells like honey. There is probably very little difference between bee shit and honey. I look closely at my arm, and the little amber spots of bee shit are the same color as honey. Watching the bees, as some take a break from coffee blossom and visit the flowers in the bungalow gardens, they look a little drunk. Between bee shit and coffee blossom, life is tolerable, if a little odd; it can also be very good. I wait for the jugs of honey that will soon come to the bungalow, gathered by intrepid Kodava tribesmen who climb the tall trees to harvest the honeycombs.

Blossom season comes and goes. It takes a second set of showers to set the fruit once the flowers have opened. The fruit has set and ripened into glowing bright red berries, or coffee cherries, in plantation parlance. Mandarin orange trees inter-planted amongst the coffee bushes also flowered on time, and the little oranges are ripening nicely. The jackfruit trees are laden with their enormous bulbous fruit, each hanging close to the tree trunks, strange looking thick-bumpy-green-skinned things, each weighing up to eighty pounds. I look forward in anticipation to the first ripe jackfruit, which one of the servants will hack open with a large and very sharp aruval—the hand-forged carbon steel scimitar shaped knife of a multitude of purposes. The knife will need to be wiped periodically with cooking oil to prevent the milky white sap from the jackfruit skin and pith from sticking to it. It is a messy process, but the rewards are great: masses of fragrant yellow pods, each three to four inches long and covered with a thin loose outer skin that must be first peeled away, are extricated from the innards of the big green carcass. To describe the taste to the uninitiated is impossible. Jackfruit tastes like jackfruit, chewy yet crisply yielding, sweet, yellow and strongly fragrant: it tastes like it smells. Inside each pod is an inch and a half long bean-shaped seed: the final prize. Collected and later roasted in the hot

ashes of the old cast-iron woodstove in the kitchen, their crisp papery skins rubbed off between the hands, the seeds are treat all on their own, floury, nutty, with a mild bite-back on the tongue.

The figs high up in the massive spreading banyan trees are also turning red and ripe, out of reach and inedible to all but the birds and animals that favor them, most of all the flying fox, a fruit eating bat with reddish brown fur, pointed ears, bright soulful round eyes and a face like a little dog, or a fox. They taste good, cooked in a curry, the flying fox, I've heard it said.

This is a good time to go for a walk, this time of ripening, through the coffee fields under the jungle canopy, before the monsoon rains come in earnest in June and stay unabated well into September. And so I walk, every morning after breakfast, when my husband has left for his rounds on the estate and our daughter has left for school. With me walks the dog, an old black Lab, who was really my husband's dog, but who seems mostly to prefer my company now. She doesn't startle at the sound of a twig cracking underfoot as she used to, while looking constantly over her shoulder in alarm, almost ten years ago when I first married her master, and took her out on our first walks through the tea fields in the Anamalais, and later through the jungles surrounding other tea fields in Manjolai, further down south on the Western Ghats. I wondered then why she was so timid, and it did not take me long me to realize that it was her master who made her cower, by the mere sound of his voice. She spent most of her time at the back of the house on the kitchen verandah with the servants then, on her bed of gunnysacks, when we first met.

And so every morning, we walk, the dog and I, first with my daughter Kate down the long driveway to the road where we wait for the little van that stops to pick her up and carry her to her long day at school. On the way back up the driveway we turn right onto a wide track that leads through the coffee fields and the jungle and loops back around, eventually bringing us back

to the driveway up to the bungalow. The walk can take about an hour if I want it to, as I explore narrow side-paths that branch off and meander through the coffee. Occasionally I walk back over a small hill that is not planted with coffee, yet has a path that has been beaten through the tangled undergrowth, past large old trees and downhill under a loop of thick electric cables, eventually joining up with the main track. As I walk, I am immersed in the deep green tropical tranquility of this place. Looking up into the jungle canopy as we walk under a familiar big banyan tree, I see the same flock of flying fox that roost there every day, hanging asleep in their daytime dormitories high up in the branches, their wings wrapped around them like blankets. The sounds of songbirds and chirping tree frogs fill the air.

It is a walk for thinking and reflecting, and wondering what went wrong and when and how and why it did, and what should or ought to be done next. This place is a paradise, but it comes with a heavy price, and it's a price I need to decide whether I can continue to pay. If I decide I can no longer continue to pay this price, there will be another price that must inevitably be paid. My marriage, difficult from day one, has become intolerable. When he walks into the house for lunch as he does every day, and in the evening when he returns from his duties on the plantation, my husband is accompanied by a palpably oppressive miasma that surrounds him and follows him like an aura which makes me flinch, and my eyes twitch. My husband, to summarize nine years of a mystifying marriage, is a master at the art of emotional and psychological abuse. And I, though I have tried every conceivable approach to reach him, to stop the abuse, to change the parts of myself that appear to displease, only to find there are always new ways I displease, that bring on yet more verbal disparagement, I have found nothing has helped and nothing has changed. There is no way, I have come to realize, that I can rationally and logically communicate with this man. I must decide whether I can live with this, or whether I can live with

myself, if I take my daughter away from her home, her father and everything that is familiar to her. This is the other inevitable price I will have to pay.

This morning, on my walk, I see elephant dung at the side of the track, a short way into the field. The elephant has been eating oranges and jackfruit, among the other things elephants eat – grass, leaves, shoots. There are jackfruit seeds and partially digested oranges visible in the dung. I imagine how the elephant must have reached up and pulled a ripe jackfruit down with its trunk, then crushed it underfoot and carefully picked out the fruit pods one by one with the delicate pointed tip of its trunk. This I imagine, from past observations of tame elephants, though I have never seen one eat a jackfruit in particular. I wonder where the elephant is, and continue on my walk, watchful. Though some estates including this one have had tame working elephants in the past, this estate does not, now. On the way back I take the path over the hill, walking under the low hanging overhead electric cables. Looking up at them, an idle and curious thought passes through my consciousness: I could probably reach and touch them if I stood on my toes and stretched out my arm. I do not do this however, not with any aforethought as to whether I should or should not. The thought that passed through did not demand action. The cables, I reason to myself, since they're hanging so low, must be benign, harmless, perhaps telephone cables. I walk on.

Getting back to the bungalow, I am advised by the estate watchman not to go to field number nine on my morning walk as there's a lone wild tusker in the area. I have just come from field number nine. I already know there's an elephant out there somewhere, having walked by its dung, but it has now developed a personality and a presence. It is a lone wild tusker, therefore a male. For it to be alone, it must be around fifteen years old, which is young for an elephant. He will have been forced to move away from the matriarchal group because he is now, like

female elephants of the same age in his herd, sexually mature. He will get an opportunity to mate only when he is about thirty years old and capable of competing with other bulls for estrous females. Being in Musth , and therefore sexually excitable, he will have tried anyway, and will have been banished after a losing mock-battle, fought while challenging the reigning bull elephant. Because he is in Musth, and unable to satisfy the sexual urges this brings upon him, he will be irritable, and extremely dangerous. No one on the estate is however alarmed. We all know he will eventually move on, if left alone, and so news of the elephant's whereabouts travels around the estate as it generally does, by word of mouth. I decide to avoid field number nine on my walk the next day.

Morning dawns and another news report makes its way quickly around the estate, all the neighboring estates and the village: the young tusker is dead, electrocuted as he walked down the path on the hillock under those low-hanging cables, which were not after all, benign, but high-voltage electric transmission lines, carrying a load of 1,500 volts between sub-stations. This is a major lapse of line maintenance procedures laid squarely on the shoulders of the State of Karnataka Electricity Board and plantation management contacts them and informs them immediately. The Electricity Board sends a crew out to hoist the cables back to their proper height.

There is a steady stream of people from the estates and the village who come to look at the dead elephant. I do not go. I do not want to have the image of a dead young tusker unjustly felled in his prime imprinted on my brain. My brain holds pictures of most of the events, places, people, animals, birds and insects in exquisite or excruciating detail, whether the former or the latter depends on the context. I am saddened by the news of the young tusker's death, and must find a new path to walk on, to avoid seeing his remains. Young tuskers walk with a certain

panache, as they swish their tails from side to side, flap their ears, and sashay their way jauntily through the jungle. I prefer to picture him like this, sashaying through the jungle, stopping by a coffee plantation to eat jackfruit and oranges.

There is however, the matter of the dead elephant that must be disposed of. The forest department has been informed and they come to remove and take possession of the tusks. Our estate workers dig a pit on the side of the hill just below the elephant and fill it with wood from old culled Robusta coffee bushes. Coffee wood has a very high calorific value: it burns long, strong and slow. We burn the same wood in the bungalow fireplaces, to keep the rooms warm in the damp cold of the monsoons, and to dry our clothes in front of. The pyre is lit and gravity eases the dead elephant onto it. Workers stand guard and tend the fire over the next week.

Standing on the patio at the side garden of the bungalow, I can see smoke rising and hanging in the air over the tops of the trees. Every now and then when the wind blows towards me, I catch a whiff of roasting elephant.

I take another path on my morning walk for the next week, and think of another elephant, a little over nine years ago. On the afternoon of our wedding day, after the wedding lunch at the Savoy Hotel in Ooty, a little hill station up in the Nilgiri Hills, my new husband and I had driven down the steep Sighur Ghat road. We were headed for the village of Masinagudi at the border of the Mudumalai Game Reserve, for the wedding of a daughter of an old friend of his. Coming down off the mountains into the plains, entering the scrub jungle, my husband stopped the car on a small bridge over a culvert. "Have to take a piss," he said, as he shut off the engine, hopped out of the car and walked into the bushes by the side of the road. I sat in the car, admiring my wedding and engagement rings as the sun shone on them. It felt good to be wife: I had a husband, we were a family. I was thirty three and had very recently lost my family, both parents

having died two months apart a few short months ago. My husband came sprinting back to the car, frantically zipping up his pants on the way, "Elephant!" he said, grinning, as he hopped back in the car, started up the engine and drove quickly away from the bridge. Lone elephant in the scrub jungle by the side of the road—we did not see it: an elephant can hide in plain sight in the jungle—standing perfectly still it can look like a shadow of a bush or tree, or a rock. The rocks in some parts of these jungles are the same color and size as an elephant. We made it safely to Masinagudi.

What went wrong between us, between that elephant then, nine years ago, and this one now? There had been brief, fleeting incidents, harbingers of the trouble to come, of a sequence set. I had a slight taste of it that evening after dinner as we made our way to our guest room. He had been inexplicably rude; I brushed it off, cuddling tearfully up to him in bed. That memory is very vague, the night was dark, and he hugged me to him saying "there there, don't be silly, it'll be alright." The mystery had begun. I remember only the darkness, and the sense of control he exuded.

The day after our own wedding had been jarringly strange and disturbing. We walked into the roomful of guests for his friend's daughter's wedding, and my husband stopped to greet a couple, old friends of his, the man a planter, and his wife. He exchanged jovial greetings, then said something derogatory about America or Americans, and with the next breath gestured towards me, saying "meet my wife, she's an American." I, so taken aback at this strange introduction, do not remember what exactly he had said about Americans, only that it was unmistakably derogatory. The wife of the couple looked at me, one eyebrow raised, an unspoken invitation to defend myself. I smiled, not acknowledging the slight, saying nothing but "pleased to meet you," and kept on smiling. There it was, my fatal flaw: I was unable to stand up for

myself, to defend myself, then as always. I did not realize this then however. It takes too many years to learn this about myself, and by the time I do, it's too late. With my failure, then, to speak up for myself, I set the stage and the tone for the rest of my marriage. What would have happened had I not been prone to flight when faced with a situation demanding a fight-or-flight response? Eager to please, too eager to avoid confrontation, I am always the first to concede defeat, to admit blame where there is none, to retreat.

Had I picked up the gauntlet, challenged him then, stood up for myself, would he have turned to me, as he did, a few steps further into the room, snarling in an undertone: "Why are you following me? Go on and introduce yourself to people," leaving me, his wife of one day, to find my own way, mystified, hurt and alone in a crowd of strangers? Yes, we all have our flaws, and my husband's were particularly harsh, but my flaws were fuel to the flames that destroyed our marriage.

This elephant now, nine years later, takes a week to burn. When I am sure there is nothing left but ashes, I walk for the first and last time to the funeral pyre, and find it still smoldering, wisps of smoke rising into the jungle air. I stand there a while, mourning both the death of the elephant, and of my marriage. I have made my decision.

The monsoon rains come, and in mid-July, one gloomy night during dinner, when he is as he often is, well fueled with rum, in the midst of a recurring tirade, the context of which never seems to have any bearing on reality, he says, unbidden, "I will destroy you before I let you go."

I have not yet told him I am leaving.

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Illustrations

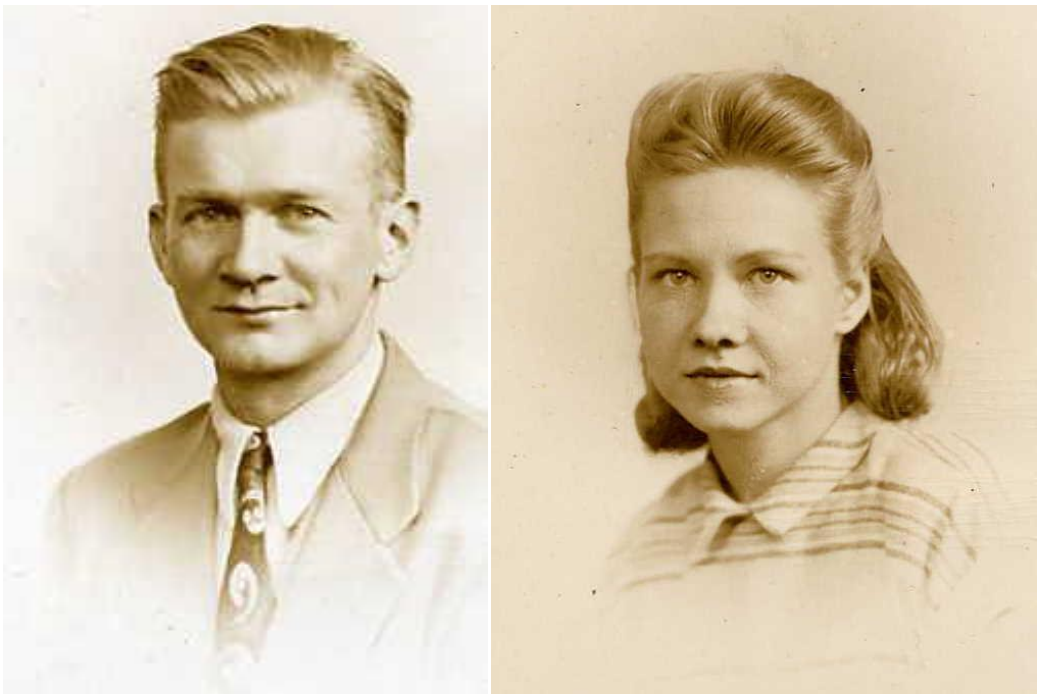
Leftovers from the British Empire:

Stories from Post-Colonial India

Alexander Momot and Julia Roze, c 1944, Bangalore, India

Alexander and Julia Momot, May 30, 1945, Bangalore, India

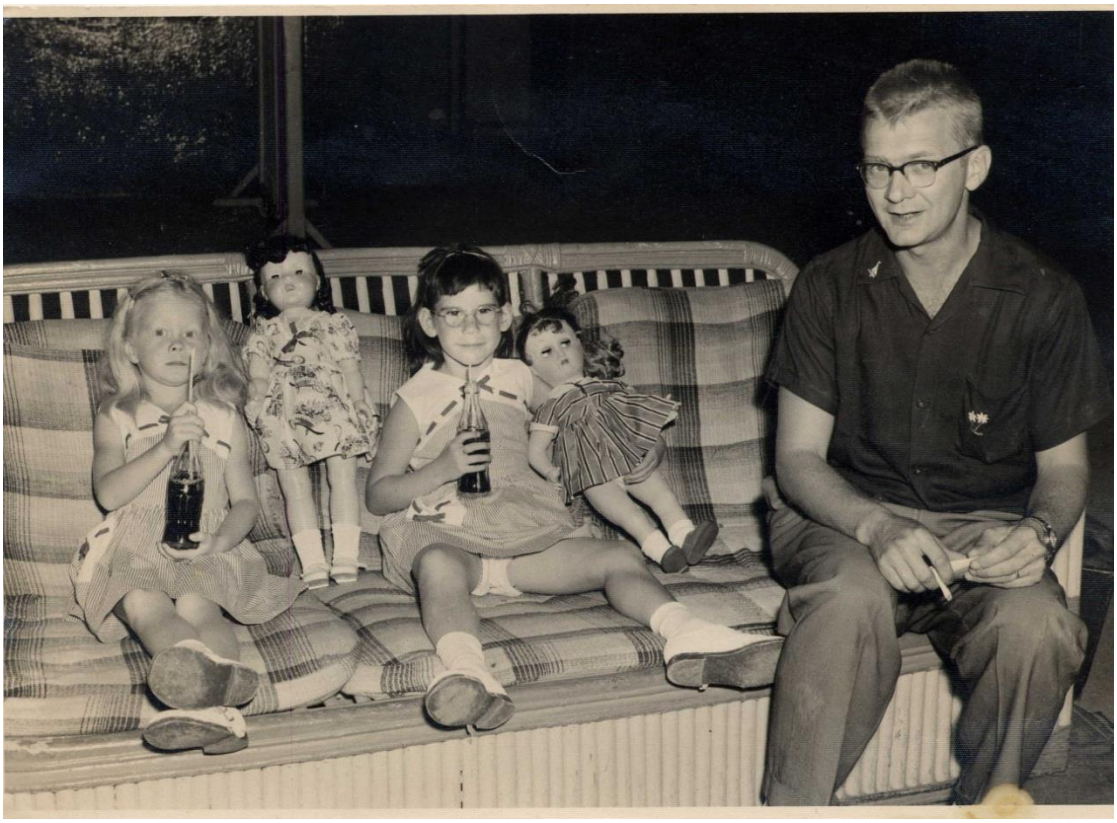
Mother on her honeymoon – Julia Momot Ooty, 1945



My Parents - Alexander and Julia Momot – Brooklyn, NY, c 1946

My Mother's Parents – John Roze and Kathleen Muller

My Father's Parents John and Pauline Momot with three of their four sons
John (died as a boy), Alexander and William (Henry not yet born)
Brooklyn, NY, c 1924-25



Wendy and Vanessa with dolls and Wendy's Daddy Alexander Momot – Bombay, c 1957

Powai Lake, 1984

Powai Lake – with Daddy, 1984

Mother's car – heading down the Sighur Ghat Road, 1984

Mudumalai – the River by the Forest Department Guest Bungalow, 1984

Mudumalai – Mother and the Watchman in front of the Bungalow, 1984

Buck Monkey at the Bungalow railing

Mother feeding the monkeys on the Bungalow verandah, 1984

Mudumalai Mahran and Mother – getting ready for the ride, 1984

On elephant-back in the Mudumalai jungles – charging young tusker, 1984

Mercy Ayah at Eureka – 1984

Granny at Eureka – 1984

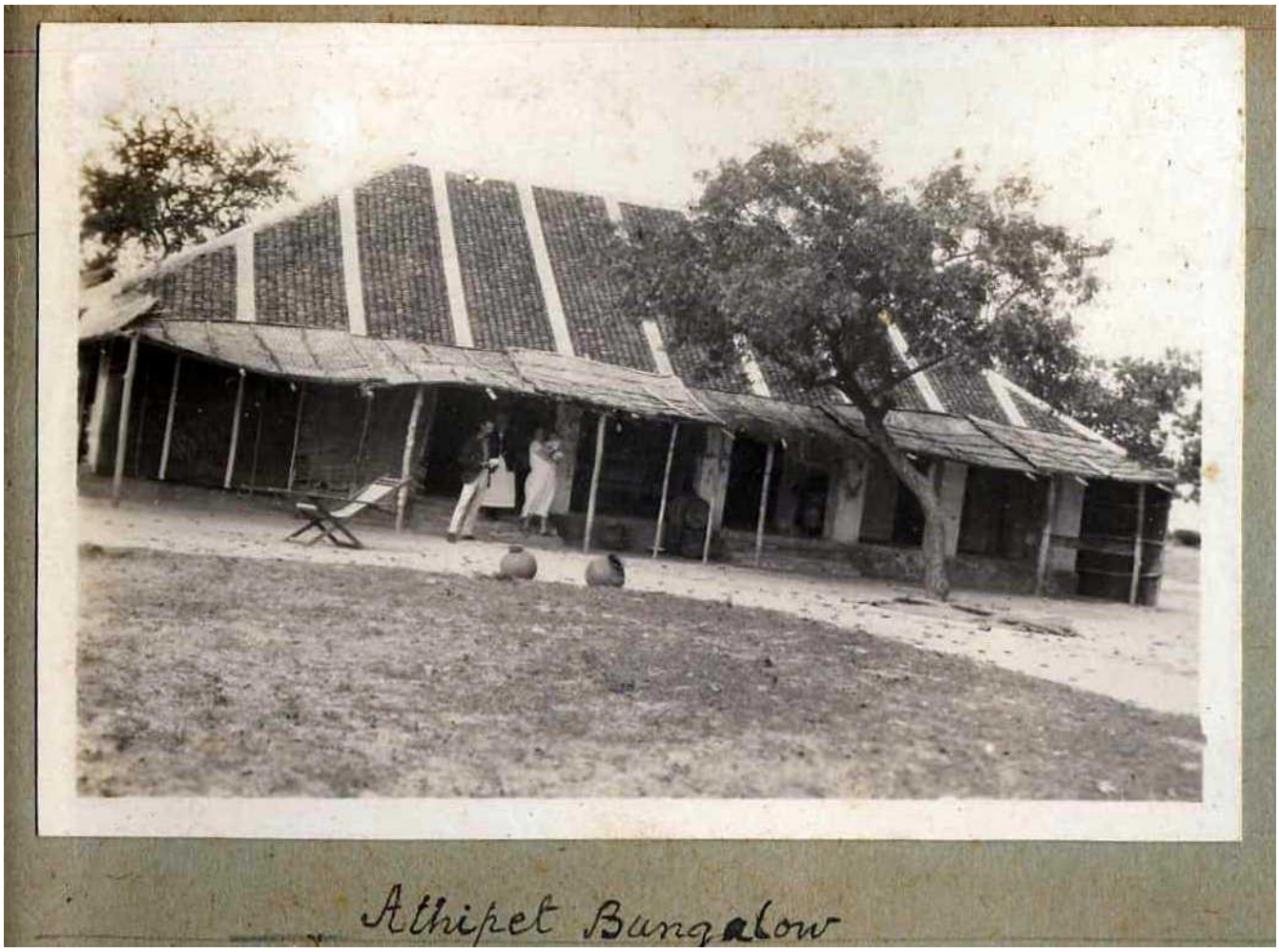
Eureka – 1984

‘The Sniper', an Afridi tribesman from the Khyber, 1920 (c)
Photograph by Randolph Bezzant Holmes (1888-1973)

http://prints.national-army-museum.ac.uk/image/446958/randolph-bezzant-holmes-an-afridi-tribesman-from-the-khyber-1920-c

Ratna among the detrius after Mother's death – playing my old harmonica, 1984

Kathleen and John Roze with baby Julia, 1922



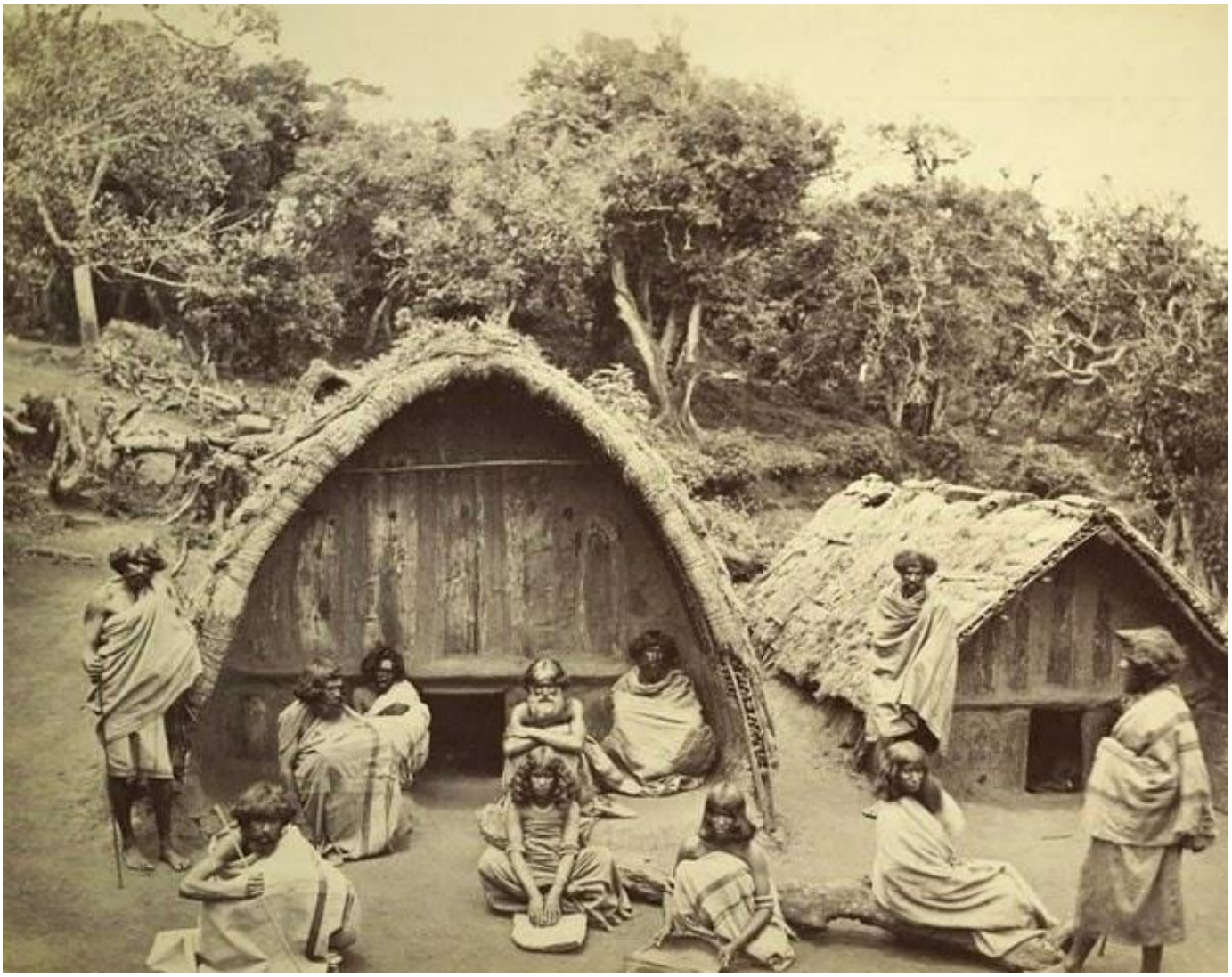
The Roze Family at Athipet Bungalow – c 1926 – Great Grandmother Janet Muller in the shadows in the background
Life in the Salt Department – British Civil Service

Kathleen Roze with Julia and baby John (and chickens), c 1926

Kathleen and John Roze
Granny and Grandpa at Whitefield c 1975

Savoy Hotel, Ooty – front verandah

West End Hotel, Bangalore



Toda mund, villages & Todas, Neilgherries. Photographer: Bourne, Samuel.
(Also: *Toda mund, village and Todas [Ootacamund]).*
Photograph of a Toda mund (hamlet) in the Nilgiri Hills in Tamil Nadu, taken by Samuel Bourne in 1869.
British Library Web Site:

http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/photocoll/t/019pho000015s10u00060000.html
http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/photocoll/t/019pho000000011u00028000.html

Photograph of Tarnat Mund, a Toda village in the Nilgiri Hills in Tamil Nadu, taken by an unknown photographer from the Madras School of Arts in c. 1871-72. This photograph forms Plate VIII of James Wilkinson Breeks *'An Account of the Primitive Tribes and Monuments of the Nilgiris'* (India Museum, London, 1873). The British Museum Web Site: http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/photocoll/t/019pho0000974s1u00008000.html

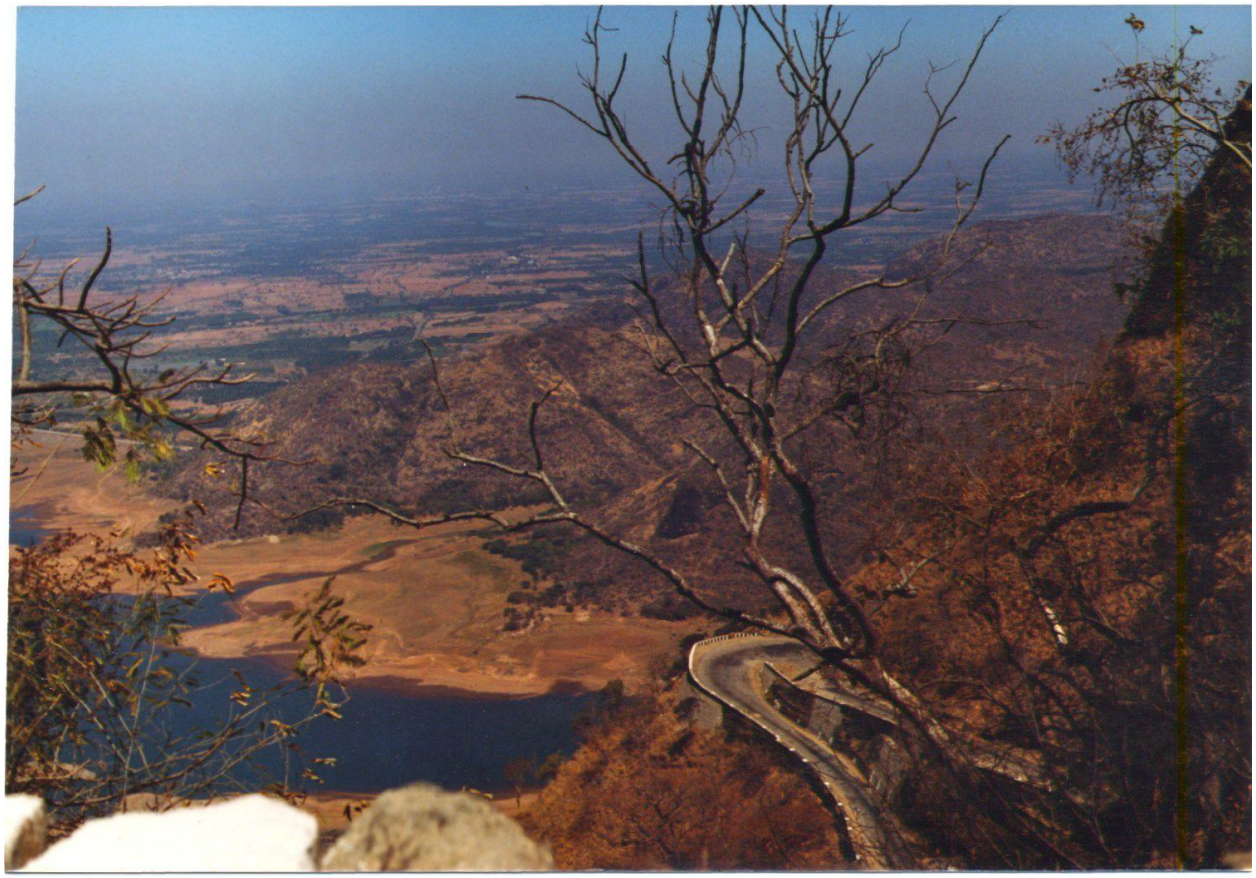
Breeks, at the time Commissioner of the Nilgiris, described this photograph as a Toda hamlet or village that consisted of about five buildings, three of which were inhabited, one that was used as a dairy and another as a stable for the buffalo calves. The houses seen in this view are built of bamboo that is closely laid together, fastened with rattan and covered with thatch, a process which renders them watertight.

Photograph of two Toda men and a woman from the Nilgiri Hills in Tamil Nadu, taken by an unknown photographer from the Madras School of Arts in c. 1871-72. This photograph forms Plate III of James Wilkinson Breeks *'An Account of the Primitive Tribes and Monuments of the Nilgiris'* (India Museum, London, 1873). Downloaded from British Museum Web Site
http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/photocoll/t/019pho0000974s1u00003000.html

Elephants in the tea fields at Mudis

After the wedding, at the Savoy Hotel Bar: Jimmy and Wendy – Husband and Wife

Mukkotumudi Estate Bungalow – packed for the move to Manjolai
Jimmy, Judy the Lab, Wendy



Looking down the Anamalai Ghat Road

On the road to Manjolai

Manjolai – Tea Fields

Manjolai Tea Pluckers – Malar 6th from left

Manjolai Tea Pluckers – weighing in – Malar (center)

Jimmy & Wendy – early days at Manjolai Estate

At Manjolai - Dressed up for something…

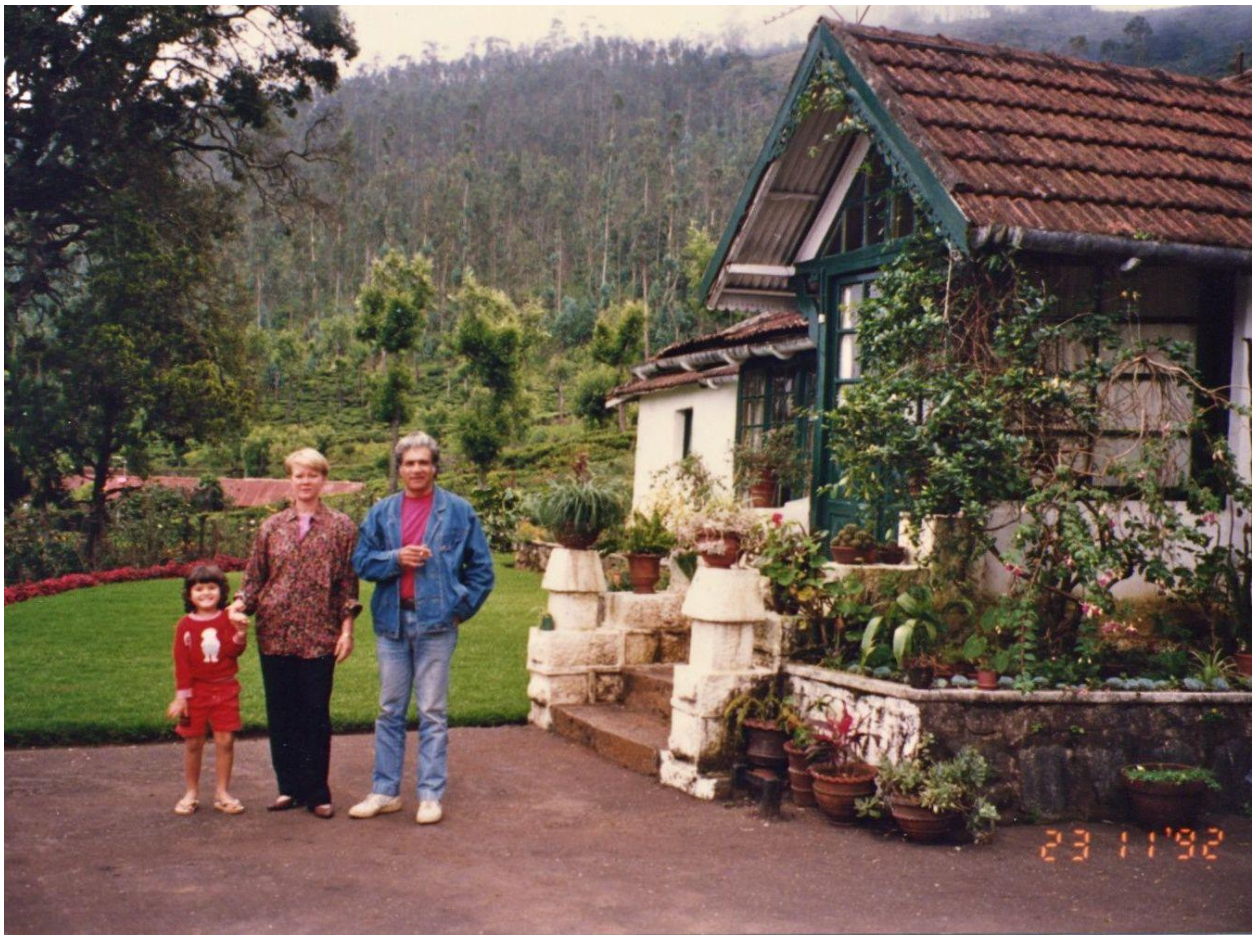
Planters Wives at Manjolai (some visiting, some resident)

Pregnant – on the beach at Tuticorin – almost time, 1988

Baby Kate at home in Manjolai, 1988

Kate, Wendy and Judy - At Manjolai in the Bungalow Garden, Singampatti Group

Judy and Jimmy at Kutheraiveti lookout point – Singampatti Group



Kate, Wendy and Jimmy – Dunsandle Bungalow, November 1992

Coffee Blossom in Coorg, 1994

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